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About Time

Australia's National Prison Newspaper

1 Year of About Time!
It's been a year since we published our first edition of About Time. Thank you to everyone who has contributed and read the paper. We hope you're enjoying it.



NEWS AND INVESTIGATIONS

Locked Down But Not Forgotten

Lockdowns reach mainstream media and people are responding
By Denham Sadler
Read on page 6.



Ike Curtis

EXPERIENCES

Beyond Stereotypes: Young Men on the Inside

By teachers and students in a juvenile justice centre

The classroom in a juvenile justice centre is not a regular classroom. It is barricaded with locks and walled with barbed wire. The students are not your regular students either – the young men may have committed crime. But they're humans – and as a teacher, they have a way of moving you and burrowing beneath your skin, that no other student can.

The young men are clever and talented. They write raps that punch you straight in the heart, crafted entirely by their experience and skill. They understand mathematics on an unequalled scale because they have used it to survive.

They are amongst the strongest people I know. Not only because their fists can break through walls, but also because they have hearts that continue to beat despite the fact that they could have given up a long time ago. Sometimes, they are also amongst the most grief-ridden, heartbroken, lost.

Despite all their challenges, they walk into the classroom, shake my hand, and tell me riddles or stories about their mum or their little brother. They care about real world issues; they want to know about what is happening in the US, they recite facts about Elon Musk, they understand the politics of the world in such a grave and coherent manner, and they have never needed a teacher to tell them.

I tell them what *About Time* is and I explain that there is a place for their voices to be heard.

Given the opportunity, these boys, who have evaded school and literature and all things academic, sit down for an hour in silence and write two pages worth of words just to have their voice heard. Here are some of their voices:

> "I am a young Aboriginal man. I have been around crime my whole life... the reason I do crime is to put food on the table for my family and to get clothes and to support my habits. I think this is the time to break the cycle."
> - B

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Letters

Lit a Light of Hope

By Zayne

Zayne writes from Metropolitan Remand Centre in Victoria.

Greetings, prison newspaper.

I am writing to you from the Metropolitan Remand Centre just after lock in at approximately 5pm.

I read your paper the night previous, and a part of me that previously was dead or dying suddenly felt alive and connected to others with similar struggles and trauma.

I am 28 years old and come from a single mother with three other step siblings. My mum had me at 21 and at an early age, I was given a Criminal Reference Number. I have spent two years out of prison since the age of 19, roughly 8 years. I feel like there is no future for me until I read an article in your paper about post release stress disorder that lit a light of hope in myself that previously no one else could. I have been incarcerated for two weeks now, and awaiting sentencing in three months time. The reasons for these offences I put down to mental health issues such as PTSD, PRSD, depression, anxiety and an extremely poor peer support network and so on and so forth, lack of housing, drug substance abuse that all seemed to feed each other and when I live like this, it is impossible to find the one thing that could save me a proper healthy relationship. They say loneliness is like a hunger, and though my life was shit, is shit, I feel like the law of attraction brought the worst of people and situations. So I just want to say thanks for your newsletter/prison paper.

Zayne

Nowhere to Live

By Tony

Tony writes from a prison in Victoria.

Dear About Time,

I'm currently 10 years and three months into my 8½ year to 11½ year top sentence. I'm 56 years old, and not getting any younger. I've done all the things required by the APB to be released, and I was given a release date of 26 March 2025.

Needless to say, I'm still in prison. I cannot get accomodation. It seems to me that the biggest issue to most prisoners is accommodation. In Victoria, we have a new program for people that don't have anywhere to go after release, or are at risk of homelessness post release. But, it seems that ARC can only help one in 30 people. I know of two people here at my prison that have gained accommodation through ARC, but many that have been rejected, including myself. Something needs to be done, as people are doing time that they don't have to be doing (like myself), and it's costing the taxpayers a lot of money to keep us in here, when it would be cheaper to house them on the outside.

If I get to the end of my sentence (another 13 months), then I will be dropped into a motel for three days, then after that, I'm on my own. It doesn't seem fair.

Some people are lucky to get housing through ARC, but most aren't. Thanks for listening.

Breaking the Cycle

By Vishal

Vishal writes from Alexander Maconochie Centre in the ACT.

Hello,

My name is Vishal, I did my first custodial sentence at the age of 16 and have found myself constantly in court ever since (I am now 31 years old).

I enjoy reading the publications in your paper, it is a great idea and a lot of the stories are extremely relatable and remind me that I am not alone.

It is helpful to hear a lot of people across the nation are facing similar battles, including the revolving door with incarceration. I have made determined efforts to change my life since being released from juvenile detention in 2011, but sadly I have returned to custody three times since. I am currently incarcerated in the Alexander Maconochie Centre in the A.C.T (Canberra).

It gets disheartening but I am determined to break free of this system.

It has taken years of counselling and working on myself to realise a lot of my youth offending stemmed from low self-worth and seeking approval from the wrong people, largely due to my upbringing which was a violent household and a massive clash of cultures. Me being the first in my family to be born and raised in Australia.

I like to spend my jail as positively as I can, exercising, drawing, writing, reading and playing ping pong.

I specialise in portraits and sketch portraits for the boys of their kids and loved ones. I also enjoy graffiti art and sketching cars. I would love to share two sketches I have done during my time on remand this time in, hopefully it can inspire and motivate fellow prisoners across the nation.

The first one is of a rider on a GSX Suzuki, and the second is of one of my greatest idols, Muhammad Ali. They are just photocopies as I have kept the originals, so they have not captured all of the detail but still two of my best drawings this time round.

Lastly I wish to share a poem that I wrote in 2017, my first custodial sentence as an adult.

People that you've let down, the true ones forgive you,
You've just gotta bounce back, dig deep within you,
You're just gotta hold on, don't let them break you,
Cas if you chose to let go, it's one big mistake to,
I've been through some hard times, nearly on the brink of it
and trust me these hard times, they're just gonna keep coming,
The way of the warrior, never show no weakness,
Even though inside you may be feeling defeated,
You just gotta know that you ain't all alone,
In your quiet cell or the busy sheets you roam,

Thank you for reading, looking forward to your next issue, hopefully some of my work makes the cut!

Kind Regards,
Vishal

Vishal's drawing of the ride on the GSX Suzuki is on page 28.

Important Note:
We can now pay people who write for us on the outside. Due to laws and regulations, we cannot pay writers when they're in prison – but if you make contact with us when you get out, we can pay you then. Our email is:

info@abouttime.org.au

or postal address:

About Time
PO Box 24041
Melbourne 3000

Prison Visitor Restrictions in NSW

By Micky

Micky writes from Cessnock Correctional Centre in NSW.

Dear About Time,

Hi guys! My name is Micky and I'm currently incarcerated in NSW. I'm nearly halfway through an 8 year sentence, but I've been in jail for 13 years out of the last 14 and a half years. Not a good run, I know. In all this time, we have so badly needed exactly what 'About Time' provides. So many of us incarcerated greatly appreciate the space you guys provide for us all to stay connected, for the sense of community it creates and the information you provide that we otherwise would never have. So thank you About Time!

The issue I wish to discuss with everyone is something I'm dealing with personally myself right now and I know for a fact I'm not the only one! NSW Corrective Services have written a policy that allows Centres to refuse contact visits between inmates to any family member(s) who are currently on a community based order. This includes parole, Intensive Correction Orders (ICOs) and Community Correction Orders (CCOs). Most Centres enforce this policy and rarely make exceptions.

My situation is as follows. My partner of several years was pregnant with our daughter at the time of my offence, unknown by either of us at that time. Because my partner was present at the time of the offence and refused to assist police, they charged her as an accessory. She was eventually bailed with the strict condition to have no contact with me. It took three years for her case to resolve, and in that time, we could not have contact.

For three years we were forbidden to speak even one word to each other. We both made sure to obey the conditions. My daughter was born healthy and happy in that time and is two and a half now. When my partner's case was finalised, she was sentenced to a 15 month Intensive Corrective Order (ICO). After all that time, we could finally be reunited as a family. We could talk everyday, I could speak to my daughter, every morning and every night. But because of this policy, our family still suffers terribly. I have never met my beautiful daughter, never held her or kissed her or looked into her eyes and told her Daddy loves her. I crave so badly to take my partner and our daughter into my arms and hold them. We all need that physical connection so, so much, to keep our family strong, keep our relationships strong.

I have not had one single charge in nearly four years, which is a huge turn around for me. I requested a contact visit, explaining the whole situation, and got refused. No explanation at all, just because the policy says I can.

It cannot be understated the importance that must be placed on inmates personal and familial relationships and support networks. Keeping these relationships strong and keeping families together is the number one factor that impacts rates of reoffending. Any inmate that loses his partner whilst incarcerated, especially where children are involved, will go home to no family and no support, there will most likely be recidivism in these circumstances.

This policy of denying contact between loved ones and families, based solely on a community order, is breaking families apart. It puts offenders, children and the community as a whole in a much worse situation. I struggle to understand...

My partner and I try our best to keep our love strong but it's like the hits never stop.

I have to try to explain to my crying two and a half year old daughter, regularly, why she cannot meet her Daddy in person. She can't understand, and frankly, neither can I.

Thanks for taking the time to read my letter.

Thanks again, you guys are great!

From Micky
Cessnock Correctional Centre, NSW

Cost of Living Crisis in Prison

By Anonymous

The author writes from Ravenhall Correctional Centre in Victoria.

Money is tight. People are struggling. We hear about it on the news. We read about it in the newspapers daily.

In some respects, we're lucky not having to deal with the daily cost of living pressures that those in the general community are facing.

But what happens when the cost of living pressures creep into the prison with us?

For myself, I am currently incarcerated in a privately run prison. This prison does not run their own canteen. Instead, they outsource to a third party that purchases products from the local IGA supermarket, then place their own percentage increase on the products before selling them on to the prison population.

With inflationary prices being what they are on the outside, you can just imagine what we are being charged!

Our top wage is only $38.40 per week from working six hours a day, five days a week.

I also reside in a self-catered lodge, where we are responsible for ordering and cooking our own meals.

This is a fantastic way of ensuring our meals are healthy, fresh and have flavour.

However, our weekly budget is only $52 per person to cater for all of our kitchen needs. And this is purchased through that same third party previously mentioned.

As an example to the price increase, something as simple as sausages advertised in the paper for $5.33 per kg, we are charged $15.99 per kg. Bolar Beef Roast advertised for $10.99 per kg and we pay $21.99 per kg. The same with chicken breast at $10.99 per kg versus $16.20 per kg.

I won't even mention how expensive basic vegetables have gotten for us for the risk of sending somebody into shock.

Then to add insult to injury, as from the day I am writing this, we have been informed the prison's very own bakery will no longer supply the lodges with bread. We must now purchase bread along with the rest of our self-catering needs, with absolutely no increase in our budget.

I'm sure we can't be the only prison going through such a budgetary and shortage of food crisis. And I know many of you out there can relate to the poor diets inflicted upon us in the prison system and how our complaints/constructive feedback always seem to fall on deaf ears.

Perhaps I was a little premature suggesting that in some respects we are lucky, in this cost of living crisis affecting our nation.

It seems even in prison, inflation has us hurting.

Worse for us, because in prison we don't have the luxury of options.

I hope you all can keep your chins up during these trying times with the knowledge that the unfairness is being felt in other places as well.

Anon
Ravenhall

About Time

Australia's National Prison Newspaper

We are the new national newspaper for people in prison across Australia. We want this to be a paper for people who are incarcerated, by people who are incarcerated. Our aim is to distribute the paper to every person in every prison and detention facility across Australia. This is our twelfth edition, distributed to all prisons in Victoria, New South Wales, Tasmania, South Australia, Queensland and the Australian Capital Territory. We hope that Western Australia and the Northern Territory will join us soon.

Our team is made of a group of passionate individuals from around Australia, some of whom have been incarcerated, and others who have worked and volunteered in criminal justice, law and journalism for many years. We are always looking for others to join us.

Write to Us

If you would like to contribute to any of the sections of our paper, or if you would like to correspond with us or provide comments, please write to us at:

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000

Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

contribute@abouttime.org.au

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Chasing the Wind

By Kelly

Kelly writes from Broken Hill Correctional Centre in NSW.

To all the staff at About Time Newspaper and all avid readers,

This is one of my many thoughts on all the moments in life I may have taken for granted – of memories of my younger years. And here's to us all making new memories, whether in our youth or mature years.

Peace, Love, and Respect

Chasing the wind

Bob Seger sings about the feeling of missed moments, or perhaps not so much missed moments but the come and go of life's pleasurable and fleeting moments that became memories, passing us by. Captured frames, snippets of our memories distilled. Quickly moving from in-the-moment into capsulated time and then compartmentalised, tabbed and filed into our memory lane bank for later retrieval by reminiscence.

I wonder if Bob had many of life's luxuries at his leisurely whim to enjoy from his earned fame.
His lyrical words, genuinely croaked and sung to souls lost to the endlessness of dark nights in Texan bars of the '70s. To me, Bob often sounded just as lost and aimless, yet searching, as his lyrics.

The residue of a life lived in the echo of words, meeting air and waves of sound meeting together somewhere in the knots of surrender and beautifully articulated with grace and curiosity. How he feathered his words into song with soulful wisdom and humbly offered with a reaching bellowing to his audience, his vocal chords laced with single-matted whiskey and camel allergies.

Loved and lost, there but not, sweet but bittersweet.

Much akin to the famous son of David in the Bible, Paul aka King Solomon, the book of Ecclesiastes. He famously articulated this similar notion of chasing the unattainable by attaining meaningless things, gathering memories that were short-lived and fleeting, experiences often leaving him feeling just as empty as before and still parched for more.

That old chestnut of not living in the moment and then the moment is gone and becomes a memory. Gone. Might call this feeling, regret. King Solomon – also known as Paul, before becoming a devout believer and follower of God, Jesus Christ, writes:

> "I said to myself, look, I've grown wiser than anyone who ruled over Jerusalem in the past. I have a lot of wisdom and knowledge. Then I used my mind to really understand what it means to be wise and I wanted to know what foolish pleasure is all about. But I found out it's like chasing the wind." Pleasure is meaningless.
> – Ecclesiastes 1:16–18

I began to reflect on this concept as I often have throughout my life, of chasing the wind. Is it likened to the clutching and grasping of the intangible, the unattainable? The bold and beautiful risks we take to feel "in the moment" with the aromas of colognes and perfumes wafting and infusing the breeze around us. The smells bellowing and bouncing together into particles of air we inhale. I'm not sure.

And yes, I'm a very big fan of Bob Seger's song "Against the Wind." Could you tell?

Kind regards, and many thanks for your continuous work every month to deliver yet another great monthly edition of "About Time."

Kelly

Sparkling Sober

By Paige

Paige writes from Numinbah Correctional Centre in QLD.

Being sober feels like getting high used to.

I was scared to come to jail and get clean after 14 years of using ice daily; how would I function or get anything done, make any friends, stay slim? In my mind ice is meant to make you faster, more motivated, more social, more productive and less depressed, yes? It turns out in the end it was doing the opposite! Getting clean seems like the scariest thing ever until you just do it, and then it's not scary at all – actually quite refreshing!

I've got so much clarity, everything seems easier – of course everything's going to be hard when you're munted and off your head all the time! I'm more motivated and productive than ever, and actually able to complete tasks instead of half doing 16 things poorly.

I've got no idea why I was so busy before my incarceration. I don't work or have a partner or kids or any responsibilities really and yet I was always run off my feet always doing something and yet never getting anything done!

I'm happier than ever and the least depressed and anxious I've ever been in my adult life. In fact, I'm feeling all emotions more passionately and intensely – it's refreshing no longer being numb – and I've even grown my empathy back! I'm way more social – I spent the last couple of years cooped up inside my house predominantly alone, a nervous wreck with my mind clouded with doom and gloom.

In hindsight, the year before my incarceration was more of a prison sentence than this one locked up has been!

I feel hopeful and happy for the first time in over a decade. Everything is light, easier, brighter, better, sparkling sober.

Feedback to About Time

By Garth

Garth writes from Woodford Correctional Centre, QLD.

I really liked the *Bits & Pieces* section – more of that would be great.

Could you please include more two-person games or activities we can do in our cells when locked in?

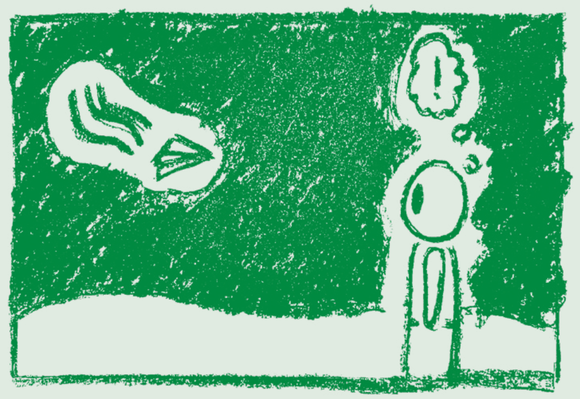
Is there any possibility of starting a pen pal system, where people can write in and be connected with others?

I'd love to see articles on how to write better – anything to help us improve.

Thanks for the paper – it's something a lot of us look forward to.

– Garth

Response From About Time:
Hi Garth – thank you for your letter! We've included more two-person games to do in the cells in this edition and some writing tips – we will continue to provide more! Unfortunately, we're unable to start a pen-pal system through About Time. Please continue to write suggestions to us, we really appreciate them.



Thank You for Your Letters

As of a few weeks prior to publication, we received letters from Kelly, Delphine, Bradley, John, David, Jeffrey, Harvey, R, Walter, J.B., Fergal, Q, George, Simon, Lien, David, D, Hugo, Kelly-Anne, C, Mike, Garth, Vishal, Paige, Kieran, Christopher, M, Joshua, Lean, G, Tony, Bill, Andrew, Jacob, Ali, A, S, Shona, James, Greg, Brendan, Zayne, G, Les, Cameron, and all those that wish to remain anonymous.

While we cannot respond directly to all letters we receive, we will aim to publish as many as possible.

Unfortunately, we are unable to return your letters or provide legal advice. If you need legal assistance please contact your local community legal service, legal aid, or your legal practitioner.

We encourage you to keep writing to us, and to encourage your friends to do the same.

If you would like to contribute to our Letters section, please send your letters to the following postal address:

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000

Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

contribute@abouttime.org.au

maurice blackburn lawyers



How TPD insurance is failing vulnerable workers

A Q&A with our superannuation and insurance principal lawyer Hayriye Uluca

Many Australians assume their TPD (Total and Permanent Disability) insurance will protect them if an injury or illness prevents them from working. However, for a significant majority of workers, that protection can vanish when they need it most.

In this Q&A, Hayriye Uluca, Principal Lawyer at Maurice Blackburn, breaks down the hidden inequities within certain TPD insurance policies. She also explains how the firm is actively challenging unfair insurer decisions and advocating for crucial change in this area.

What is TPD insurance?

So most people will have death and TPD - Total and permanent disablement cover within their super which means that if they can't work because of a medical condition, they can claim that insurance and usually they just have to show that they can't go back to the usual work that they were doing before.

There's a lot of inequities when it comes to insurance within super. We have discovered that with some insurance policies attached to some funds, because of people's employment status, they have been disproportionately disadvantaged, and we find that it's the most vulnerable people who are disadvantaged.

Why do inequities happen within certain TPD policies?

What we find is that if a person is casual or they're employed to do high-risk work, labouring, or manual work, they have to be assessed under the most difficult test of TPD, which is nearly impossible to satisfy. It's called the activities of daily living test, which means that a person must prove that they cannot perform at least two basic activities of daily living. Those activities include dressing oneself, feeding oneself, using the toilet, using the shower, or transferring from a chair to a bed for example.

In most cases, even with the most physically disabled people, we find that they can do at least two of those activities, and they don't meet the test. The other problem is that if you've got a mental health condition, there's no way that you can meet the test, despite how crippling your condition may be.

What is the impact of denied TPD cover, and how do clients react?

It can be really devastating, particularly as people are essentially relying on this as their only insurance policy when something happens. People often feel very ripped off and deceived. If they had known, they might have made a different decision to ensure that they were putting their money into an industry super fund where the insurer wouldn't have applied such a tough test because of their employment status. We're finding that industry funds don't disproportionately disadvantage vulnerable people in the way that some retail funds do.

It's really disappointing when a person receives the news that the insurance premiums they were paying for were essentially for a product that was junk. In some cases, people were completely uninsurable, so they were paying premiums for no insurance at all. It's quite devastating for a client to receive that news.

Being able to push the envelope a little bit further and get them something, either through the litigation process or by challenging and putting in a submission at claim stage — means the client feels really vindicated that we've done our very best and that it was worthwhile to bring that case to Maurice Blackburn.

What changes have you been able to make in this area? Are we seeing any change?

A lot of consumer advocacy goes into trying to be a catalyst for change, complaining about these policies and making sure it's well known that we're quite critical of insurers who apply unfair tests to vulnerable people. So, doing a lot of consumer advocacy and public policy work has been really important.

But also, on individual cases, we are using consumer protections within legislation to make sure we put insurers on notice that we don't want them to get away with these decisions where an irrelevant factor, like employment status, is used to apply a tough test and deny a person their benefits.

In 2021, the Financial Services Council prohibited the use of occupational ratings for the application of these types of restrictive tests. What that means is that, as policies get rolled out and updated, they won't be allowed to apply this really tough test to people just because they're either casual or working in a high-risk or manual job. So, that's an improvement for future consumers but doesn't address the difficulty that we've got when it comes to clients that are stuck with older policies.

What motivates you to take on difficult cases at Maurice Blackburn?

I feel really proud to be part of this team., We like to think that we're tenacious, we've got compassion, and we go that little bit further. So, when we have clients with cases we initially thought were straightforward but then realise they're not, rather than shutting down the case, we're really motivated to extend access to justice because these are vulnerable people. When you look strictly at the medical evidence, they are disabled for work, and they do meet the regular TPD test.

(This is an edited transcript of an interview with Jennifer Kanis, Social Justice Principal Lawyer and Hayriye Uluca, Superannuation and Insurance Principal Lawyer and State Litigation Leader).

Call us on
03 9605 2700
or Mail us at
21/380 La Trobe Street Melbourne VIC 3000

News and Investigations

Locked Down But Not Forgotten

By Denham Sadler

Denham Sadler is the Chief Reporter at About Time.

Continued from page 1.

People in prison will know all about lockdowns. Now, they've reached the mainstream.

The regular use of lockdowns across the Australian prison system has been in the spotlight in recent weeks, with governments under pressure to address the growing issue that is having a devastating impact on those inside.

Just a few weeks ago, the ABC's investigative program 7.30 ran a huge story about the extended lockdowns at Victoria's women's prison, Dame Phyllis Frost Centre (DPFC). The program generated significant publicity, and even reached Parliament, where the state government was asked about it in detail.

The government has since revealed that there were more than 100 lockdowns of different lengths at the DPFC between April and October last year. None of these lockdowns were due to prison disturbances; all were because of staff shortages.

Ashleigh Chapman, recently released from DPFC, regularly experienced lockdowns during her imprisonment, which she said effectively placed her into solitary confinement.

"It has a massive impact," Ashleigh told *About Time*.

"It made everything a lot more difficult. Especially in the management unit – people were just left in their cells to suffer. A lot of people are struggling, mentally and physically, and it's impacting their families."

With ongoing staffing issues, DPFC has now implemented a policy of "rolling lockdowns", which entails the prison locking down two units on any day there are staffing shortages. During these lockdowns, all people in the prison will need to have a valid appointment slip to leave their units.

Lockdowns have become a common response by prison management, resulting in staff cancelling programs and services and making it much harder for people inside to call home.

The Victorian Aboriginal Legal Service (VALS) and Law & Advocacy Centre for Women have both reported having appointments and services cancelled due to these lockdowns.

"We have received reports that programs, calls and visits – including legal and medical appointments – continue to be disrupted, with the department stating that these were due to issues with the 'administration of rostering'," VALS CEO Nerita Waight said.

"These circumstances are leaving the women with no ability to plan accordingly, to notify family members of their support services which invariably leave them feeling uncertain and unconnected."

The Law & Advocacy Centre for Women (LACW) also said the lockdowns were having a huge impact on their clients.

"LACW is deeply concerned by the impact that ongoing lockdowns are having on our clients' mental health, and on their ability to access services and programs which will aid their reintegration to life outside the prison," LACW Principal Legal Officer Ellen Murphy said.

"The ability to maintain contact with children, family, support people and service providers is integral to our clients' wellbeing, and frequent disruption to these relationships has the capacity to have devastating and long-lasting consequences."

Many people in prison have complained to the Victorian Ombudsman, who has said that this is an example of why there is a real need for independent oversight of prisons.

When asked by *About Time* about the issues at DPFC, a spokesperson for the Department of Justice and Community Safety said that "lockdowns are sometimes required to ensure the safety of staff and prisoners".

"Prisoners continue to have their healthcare needs met if a lockdown occurs and arrangements are also made to ensure access to legal services and rehabilitation," the spokesperson said.

"We are continuing to recruit hundreds of new corrections staff, with new recruits to start at DPFC soon."

The government also said that out-of-cell hours in Victorian prisons are above the national average.

There have been similar recent reports of extended and regular lockdowns in other prisons around the country.

A report by the Western Australian Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services into the Hakea Prison found that people incarcerated there were given no more than two hours out of their cells on any given day, and sometimes were not allowed out of their cell at all in a 24-hour period.

A report on the Bathurst Correctional Centre in New South Wales, based on inspections of the prison in 2023, found that a lockdown of some level took place once every three days.

The Multi-Function Accommodation Unit at the prison had 16 full-day lockdowns and four part-day lockdowns across a three month period, while the MPU had 11 full-days and six partial-days in lockdown.

And documents obtained by the Tasmanian Greens earlier this year revealed there were more than 6,150 lockdowns across the Risdon Prison's 16 units in the last year, equating to more than 16,000 hours in lockdown due to staff shortages.

One unit at the Southern Remand Centre in Rison was locked down to some level 655 times in 2024, and more than 200 of these times were for longer than four hours.

Those who are experiencing these regular lockdowns report feeling isolated and hopelessness. But the women blowing the whistle on the lockdowns want those inside to know that the pressure is increasing, and public sentiment is being influenced.

"Even though it seems like nothing is changing, we are working out here to stop them," Kelly Flanagan, who was recently released from DPFC, told *About Time*.

"Now that I'm out and telling the story, there are plenty of girls in there who are keeping records of their lockdowns. The way we can support the women is by acknowledging that we see them, we see what they're going through and we're prepared to fight for them."

Chapman also has a message to share:

"There are people that do care, and we are trying to get it sorted," she said.

"I've been there – keep hanging in there and if you need anything just reach out... there are people who want to listen and help."

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Money, Money, Money



What happens to our finances when we go to prison, and what we need to do about it

By Stacey Stokes

Stacey Stokes is a transgender woman who did eight years in a men's prison. She now works on VACRO's lived experience panel, and sits on the advisory boards of Beyond Bricks and Bars, and the Chief Psychiatrist's advisory panel. Stacey runs the T4T support group and writes a Substack, Stacey Stokes. Stacey is also a member of FIGJAM.

Finances in prison: I'm not talking about borrowing one soft drink and now owing me two. I'm talking about the state of our bank accounts and assets on the outside. People in prison in Australia face a range of issues in addition to their court ordered punishment. These then contribute to cycles of disadvantage we face upon release.

A report by Financial Counselling Australia said this is a form of "double punishment", with people leaving prison in a worse financial position than when they entered it because the system is "stacked against them".

The trauma of going to prison is so extreme that nothing matters anymore. Your life is destroyed, your liberty and agency are gone, and you rarely have time to get your affairs in order. One day you're free and the next you're dragged to your new home – a walk-in wardrobe you now share with Bob, a 50 year old repeat offender on a 100 ml of methadone.

You aren't thinking, "oh I should really contact my bank and see if I can have my bank fees waived".

But really, you totally should.

There are so many problems that are not your fault, just a symptom of your primary punishment.

Going to prison has a huge impact on your finances, whether through ongoing charges, missed tax returns or a lack of superannuation.

How going to prison impacts your finances

Prison impacts finances in many ways.

When you're inside, what little money you have will be eaten away little by little until there is nothing left, and your accounts are closed. And when you're released one day you will wish you still had that $100 that was eaten by fees, and an active account for your Centrelink to go into. Even the cheque you get upon leaving will need that active account.

Opening a new account will be an effort, and that's if you have a good case manager. If you have an inexperienced case manager or one you don't get along with it will be a real pain.

There are many things that add to the disadvantages you now face to act on your financial situation that aren't considered, such as lack of identification documents, limited financial literacy, no or limited feedback to customer support to enable troubleshooting of any issues, nominating Power of Attorney's can be challenging and ineffective, and your case worker often cannot demonstrate authority to act on your behalf. You also need to think about things like direct debits for mobile phone plans, Netflix subscriptions and gym memberships. If you're doing a year or two or more, you will need to cancel them. You should be able to do this as you will need that money to rebuild your life when you come out, and you're not a customer anymore either – you can't use their services.

If you were working prior, you will get a demand from the tax office to do a tax return or face additional legal action.

Additionally, you are afforded the new and permanent disadvantage of your super being not only slowly eroded by fees, but also not being able to work and add to it as well. This is because prison work is considered a rehabilitation program and the pay is akin to pocket money, not a wage. So when everyone should be enjoying their retirement, if you've been to jail, you will have less superannuation to live off and might need to work for longer.

What needs to change

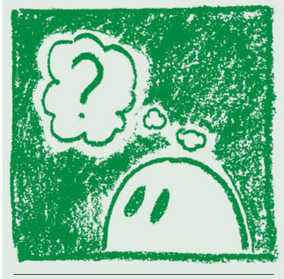
Unfortunately, the appetite for helping people in prison is low and this adds to post-prison trauma and reoffending rates.

As the report found, there are only a "small number" of financial counsellors across Australia working with people in prison and their families. They can do a range of things on behalf of an incarcerated individual, such as working with creditors, helping to access documents for tax returns, or getting utilities disconnected.

But there are not enough of these counsellors, and Financial Counselling Australia made a number of recommendations for improvements, including for the National Debt Hotline (1800 007 007) to be added to the free call list and for mandatory financial health checks to be offered to people in prison one week into their sentence.

I see this as not helping, but as a responsibility to act. Inmates have no agency of their own – it has been removed by the government. They are now in the custody of the state and as such are the responsibility of the state.

If you need help with your finances, check with your prison if financial counselling services are available. You may also be able to access a financial counsellor by phone arranged via a caseworker.



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WA

Prison watchdog flags inequity in faith access for non-Christian inmates

The independent Western Australian prison inspector has flagged concerns that those from non-Christian faith backgrounds are not able to access chaplains and other services while incarcerated.

In a report on accessing chaplaincy and faith services, the WA Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) said that people in custody who are not Christian are experiencing "difficulties engaging with religious leaders and practitioners from their faith group".

It found that non-Christian faith providers were facing problems when trying to get approval to attend prisons in the state, and that there were regular requests from within prisons for their services.

In its response to the report, the WA government agreed in principle to review alternative models for delivering these services to meet the inter-faith needs of those in prison, and to formally incorporate non-Christian and Aboriginal organisations into chaplaincy.

Inspection of court custody centres

The Office of the Inspector of Custodial Services (OICS) recently published its findings on the inspection of court custody centres in Western Australia. The OICS expressed concern about unhygienic blankets that were used multiple times without wash, with staff explaining they handled the blankets using gloves.

The use of strip searches were criticised as degrading and traumatising. The OICS recommended that court custody centres invest in body scanning technology. There was confusion among staff surrounding policies for strip searching young people, with some staff refusing to strip search young people under any circumstances. The OICS iterated that the *Court Security and Custodial Services Act 1999* outlines clear circumstances of subjecting a person "apparently 10 or more years of age" to a strip search when entering a court premise.

Some of the older courthouses have no elevators or passageways between the custody area and the courts, meaning that people were handcuffed and escorted through public areas. The OICS noted this was undignified and distressing for people requiring a wheelchair and could potentially influence the jury members, impacting the notion of a fair trial free of bias.



VIC

Victoria enforces nation's toughest machete ban

A ban on the sale of machetes is now in effect in Victoria, with the state government saying this is the toughest ban of its kind in Australia.

The sale of large, broad-bladed cutting knives is now banned in the state, whether in-store or online, with no exemptions.

The ban does not affect the "legitimate use of existing goods owned by community members", the state government said.

A legislated ban will be in place from September, and the purpose of the initial ban is to dry up supply of the weapons as much as possible before this.

Failing to comply with the machete ban will be a criminal offence.

Treaty negotiations begin with state Government

The Dja Dja Wurrung Aboriginal Clans Organisation (DJARRA) has become the first group to announce its intent to negotiate a local treaty with the Victorian government.

DJARRA said it would now consult with its people about priorities for this treaty, with a focus on an increased say in legislation, being an authority in land management and creating more economic opportunities.

DJAARA's land covers Greater Bendigo, Castlemaine and Daylesford in regional Victoria.

A treaty process is also underway at a state level in Victoria.



SA

SA to spend $7m on high-tech prison security upgrades

The South Australian government will introduce a number of new security measures in prisons across the state with nearly $7 million in funding over four years.

The new measures are aimed at preventing contraband entering prisons, and will include using high-tech security scanners in prisons including Port Augusta and Mobilong.

New body scanners were also recently installed at Yatala Labour Prison and Adelaide Women's Prison.

New barriers will also be installed at Adelaide Women's Prisons to stop contraband being thrown over the perimeter fence.

The state government said it will also make further upgrades including cameras with in-built artificial intelligence.

"Safety is the number one priority for our prisons, so this government is doing more to protect the staff and prisoners," SA Treasurer Stephen Mullighan said.

"We are cracking down on contraband so we can stop dangerous items entering correctional facilities."

New child protection laws pass parliament

Reforms to South Australia's child protection laws passed Parliament in early June.

According to Child Protection Minister Katrine Hildyard, the changes will "elevate the voices of children in decisions about their lives" and "enshrine the safety principle which ensures the safety of the child must always be the priority" when determining whether they are removed from a home.

The SA government said that the law "empowers" First Nations families to lead decision-making about their children.

But former Commissioner for Aboriginal Children and Young People April Lawrie said that the changes have been "dressed up and glossed up as being culturally appropriate and supporting self-determination".

"To me that's not good enough because the state still holds the power, that is not how you actually support self-determination for Aboriginal people," Lawrie said.



ACT

Ombudsman questions use of force by ACT police

The ACT Ombudsman has released a major report on the use of force by ACT Police, finding a number of examples of policing that "unnecessarily inflamed situations".

The ombudsman analysed more than 6000 reports of police uses of force between January 2019 and December 2023, and also viewed more than 200 pieces of body-worn camera footage and CCTV, and investigated 54 incidents involving force.

It found that in about a third of these cases, unprofessional behaviour by police officers, such as impatience, aggression or foul and abusive language, led to the situation unnecessarily escalating.

The report also found that incidents involving intoxicated people, those experiencing mental health issues and young people were particularly challenging, and urged the police force to increase the use of diversions and look at alternatives to custody for young people.

The use of force by police must be necessary, reasonable and proportionate to the threat or resistance.



NSW

NSW announces $100m boost to justice on spending

The New South Wales government has announced a "justice system package" which includes more than $100 million to address "rising demand" in the correctional system, as part of the state budget.

The funding for Corrective Services NSW will ensure it is "resourced to supervise offenders and will support their rehabilitation and reintegration", the state government said.

The budget will also include $2.3 million for the NSW Victims Register, which allows eligible victims of serious crimes to be told of their right to sign up and receive information about the perpetrator of that crime's sentence or order, location and parole eligibility.

A further $272.7 million will also go towards frontline domestic, family and sexual violence services.

Under the changes to the court system, from July anyone who has been refused bail by police in regional NSW will have their case then heard in a "virtual" court. In a statement, the Aboriginal Legal Service (NSW/ACT) raised concerns that these changes were being made without any additional funding being provided to it.

"This is going to be chaotic, dangerous and unjust," ALS CEO Karly Warner said. "We are already seeing our clients languishing in police and court cells for dangerous periods of time waiting to make a bail application due to increases in remand following changes the NSW government has made.

"The NSW government has now made changes to policy without considering the impact on Aboriginal people and the Aboriginal Legal Service."



QLD

Queensland court review recommends virtual hearings and modern laws

A review has suggested a number of changes to make Queensland's court system faster and more modern.

The changes recommended include allowing defendants and lawyers to appear virtually.

The Magistrates Courts deal with 95% of all criminal prosecutions in the state, using the 138-year-old Justices Act.

The Queensland government has announced it will work to replace this with a new Criminal Procedure (Magistrates Court) Bill.

This new legislation will focus on efficiency, greater consistency, improved clarity and reduced delays, the state government said.

QLD Government considers making public drunkenness an offence again

The Queensland government has signalled it is considering making public drunkenness and public urination crimes again, less than two years after they were decriminalised.

Queensland Minister for Police Dan Purdie said that the removal of those two offences has "hamstrung the police to be able to take action".

The decriminalisation of public drunkenness was a recommendation from the Royal Commission into Aboriginal Deaths in Custody, and Queensland was the last state to act on this reform.

Queensland Human Rights Commissioner Scott McDougall said this would "represent another blow in a continuing assault on the rights of First Nations people in Queensland".

"To reintroduce a public drunkenness offence would signal that the Queensland government has no interest in Closing the Gap or reducing deaths in custody," McDougall said.



TAS

Tasmanians to return to the polls

Tasmanians will vote again on 19 July after a no-confidence motion was passed against Premier Jeremy Rockliff, the fourth state election in seven years and just 16 months after the most recent poll.

The no-confidence vote came soon after the Liberal government handed down its budget, which included a 7% boost to law and order spending and $25 million to address pressures within the prison system.

These budget items have not yet passed Parliament and their future is unclear with the recently called election.

The budget also allocated $25 million to prisons in the state to address prison officer costs and other expenses such as water, food, clothing and bedding.

A further $2.5 million annually would have gone towards maintaining critical infrastructure at the Risdon prison.

The budget also included $250,000 annually over the next two years to continue drug and alcohol intervention therapeutic support in prisons for two years, and $496,000 to continue the delivery of programs to reduce reoffending and promote community safety, including Men's Resources Tasmania, Speech Pathology Tasmania and Dress for Success Hobart's Welcome Back initiative.



NT

Calls for independent probe into Kumanjayi White's death in custody rejected by NT Government

Hundreds of mourners gathered outside the Northern Territory parliament alongside the family and community of First Nations man Kumanjayi White, who died in police custody in Alice Springs in late May.

They have called for an independent investigation into his death, but this has been rejected by the Northern Territory Chief Minister.

The 24-year-old Yuendumu man died after being restrained by police officers at a supermarket in Alice Springs. His family has said that he had disabilities and was living away from his community in support accommodation.

Indigenous Australians Minister Malarndirri McCarthy has also said it's important for there to be an investigation independent of the NT Police, but this has been rejected by the NT Police Force.

First Nations elder dies in police custody

A 68-year-old senior Elder from the Kardu Rak Kirnmu clan died in police custody at a hospital in Darwin in early June.

Known as TN after his death, the man was a "great visionary and educator", the Thamarrurr Development Corporation said in a statement.

A spokesperson for the AFP said TN had been taken to the hospital for "sobering up" after being detained at the airport when trying to board a flight. They said he experienced a "sudden and serious medical episode" after arriving at the hospital.

The Northern Territory Police Force is now investigating the death on behalf of the Coroner.

An Unexpected Exclusive with Australian Fugitive, Markis Turner

While on a prison art tour across Asia, Damien Linnane meets Australian Markis Turner at the Manila City Jail. There, they talk of his crime, his family and comparisons between jails in Australia and the Philippines.

By Damien Linnane

Damien Linnane is the editor of *Paper Chained*, a quarterly journal for art and writing which is made available to all people in NSW prisons. Damien was sentenced to two years in prison in 2015 for crimes that were described by the sentencing magistrate as an act of vigilantism. During his sentence he wrote a crime novel, *Scarred*, and then taught himself to draw. He is currently completing a PhD on the history of prison newsletters in Australia.

When I planned a tour of the Manila City Jail in the Philippines, I had no idea I would end up meeting one of Australia's most wanted fugitives.

I had spent months lining up this tour to write a story for my prison arts magazine about the programs in Filipino jails promoting and selling art and crafts made in custody.

The Bureau of Jail Management and Penology were supportive of my request to visit and their officers greeted me enthusiastically at the gates.

"You're the second Australian journalist we've had here this month", they told me. "Channel Seven's Spotlight was just here to interview Markis Turner".

I'd been so focused on prison art I hadn't even considered that there might be an Australian person incarcerated here.

Markis is the alleged 'mastermind' behind a scheme to import more than 71 kilos of cocaine to Australia. He fled the country while on bail, and was caught after two years on the run in the Philippines. That was 2017. He's been detained here ever since.

I casually asked the prison officer if there's any chance I can speak to Markis while I'm here. I'm surprised when he doesn't appear to have a problem with that, and even more so when Markis turns up to the prison art area. I've been in the Philippines for about a week at this stage, and the first time I hear another Australian accent is when Markis says hello. He has a huge, warm smile and is decked out in the standard yellow prison uniform. He explains that he fled to this country as he was facing a life-sentence in Australia. I ask him if he was indeed the 'mastermind' of the drug smuggling plan.

"I'm guilty, I did it. There's no denying it. You can print that", he tells me.

I expect Markis to tell me the conditions in prison in the Philippines are terrible and he wished he had just stayed in Australia, but I'm surprised at his comparisons.

"Some things are better and some are worse; overall I'd say the prisons are roughly equal in terms of conditions. One thing I like is that there's no violence here. Violence in Queensland prisons was far worse. I feel safer here".

The relationship between those incarcerated and the officers is also a major difference. "The prison provides us with tap water and electricity, and a food ration called 'Rancho', usually rice and a vegetable stew, for people who have no money. But we don't interact with officers much as we have to self-manage everything else." Cell blocks in the Philippines are largely run by 'dorm bosses', incarcerated people who are given considerably more freedom, but are expected to keep things in order in return.

Typically, people in prison have their family send them money to buy food, or bring food to the jail for them, but the culture is also different. "People share everything here", says Markis, "if someone doesn't have something, people will give them what they need, without expecting anything in return." But it's not all positive. "Everyone in here also snitches on everyone else", he tells me. "If someone finds out you have something you shouldn't have, they'll go tell the officers straight away, and there will be no consequences to that person from anyone."

Another difference I noticed is rather than 'prisoners', people in jails in the Philippines are called 'Persons Deprived of Liberty' or PDL for short. I mention to the prison warden that people in Australian prisons, including ones on remand who have not been convicted of any crime, are often referred to as 'offenders'. He frowns. "That sounds very judgemental", he says, "we call them PDLs because they are only deprived of liberty for the meantime."

I ask Markis how he lives and passes the time. Conditions in the prison are drastically overcrowded, but Markis obtained his own private cell after making a once-off 'donation' to his dorm and dorm boss of 30,000 pesos (about AUD 840). It's a space of about two-by-two meters, and he tells me it was well worth it. "We do a head-count at 5am, and then we get locked down at 9pm," he says. "We have an activities hour on weekdays from 8am. Three days a week this group gathers called 'Therapeutic community'. The other two days we have Zumba, I have white-man-stiff-body-disease, so my dancing is very rudimentary and funny. I spend a lot of time hanging out with the other foreigners, and watching TV. I also take care of three cats. I choose not to work as people who work normally do so for ten hours a day, seven days a week, and just like in Australia, the pay is minimal."



Damien and Markis, Credit: BJMP

Markis is in a position of limbo. He hasn't actually committed any crime in the Philippines, and was arrested at the request of an Australian Federal Police (AFP) provisional arrest warrant. The AFP want him extradited to Australia for trial. Foreign extradition is always a time-consuming, complicated and legally grey area. Markis is fighting the extradition charge. He isn't overly confident, but he believes there is a chance he will beat it and be released in the Philippines. In any case, based on how long these things take, he estimates he will be here for another three years.

Not surprisingly, Markis says the hardest part of his imprisonment is the impact on his family and the regret he has for missing his children's lives. His wife, 11-year-old daughter Lili and 10-year-old son Hunter all live in Poland. The AFP have issued a warrant for her arrest over his wife's alleged involvement in his movements from Australia. Poland will not arrest and extradite a Polish citizen to Australia, but if she travels to the Philippines to visit Markis, the Philippines could honour the AFP arrest warrant, and she will then face the same fate as him. Markis speaks fondly of his wife. "My wife struggles being a single parent. She's a beautiful and strong woman. My kids have learning disabilities so my wife juggles work and their needs every day." Markis also talks of the particular loneliness of being in prison overseas. He seldom gets visits and the language barrier affects his ability to interact with many of the other PDLs. Many Filipinos in the general community speak English, but Markis says it's rare to find someone in prison who does.

Before I know it, my surreal conversation with the only other Australian I end up speaking to in the Philippines ends. Before I say goodbye, I offer Markis a free subscription to *Paper Chained*, hoping it can at least make him feel more connected to the outside world, but he tells me they're not allowed to receive mail.

You can read Damien's story on art programs in Filipino prisons in Issue 19 of *Paper Chained*.

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Ice Cube Drops Wisdom on Jailbreak Radio

"You can lock up my body, but you can't lock up my mind!" – Ice Cube

By Kate Pinnock (producer of Jailbreak Prison Radio)



Ice Cube and Kate Pinnock

The godfather of hip hop, rapper, and filmmaker Ice Cube from Los Angeles spoke exclusively to prison radio show 'Jailbreak' about his own experiences in the American prison system.

The radio crackles and the voice of Jailbreak producer Kate Pinnock comes through: "Jailbreak's coming straight to your cell. You're gonna be locked up and rockin' for the next hour."

Jailbreak is a prison radio show produced at Sydney's 2SER 107.3FM, streaming Sundays at 9.30pm and Thursdays 5am, and nationally on the Community Radio Network, along with a number of community radio stations.

American rapper Ice Cube was recently interviewed on Jailbreak, and he spoke about the power of imagination and how this can get you through your time in prison.

Pinnock met Ice Cube through a Canberra hip-hop crew, a community of rappers mostly with lived experience of prison led by former Jailbreak host and now record label owner Big Dave.

Asked if he had a message for the 40,000 Australian listeners in prison who would have loved to be at this show, Ice Cube spoke about the importance of using prison time to your advantage to better yourself.

"Ya gotta lotta time in there," he said. "When yo released, be productive man, because legal money is way easier to get than illegal money! So, get ya hair right, come on back out there, let's makes some legal money together!"

Pinnock has been producing Jailbreak for 17 years. She said prison radio can work magic. "Listening to radio unlocks your imagination and takes you to another place," Pinnock said."Radio is a simple, powerful medium that crosses the physical barriers of prison walls, the social barriers of disadvantage, stigma, discrimination, and the barriers of politics and bureaucracy of the criminal justice system."

Radio is the strategic force behind the Jailbreak Health Project (JHP), funded by NSW Health, providing harm-minimising health promotion, targeted at vulnerable at-risk communities, such as incarcerated people.

"People don't even have to be locked up in a prison to feel isolated," Pinnock said.

"Families feel socially isolated through the stigma and shame of prison. Jailbreak reaches out to families and the wider community."

The music and stories of people in prison are at the core of the Jailbreak program. The interview with Ice Cube is a great example of how a personal experience of incarceration draws the Jailbreak listener in.

For listeners in difficult situations such as being in prison, hearing stories, music and voices they relate to, presented by people in prison, offers reassurance that they're not forgotten, that others go through the same thing and that they're not alone. It gives hope that things get better.

Ice Cube grew up in South Central Los Angeles where he said the odds of making it to where is now were slim.

"I had people try to knock me down," he told Jailbreak.

"I got locked up at 19 years old on a humbug charge. Thank God I beat the rap and still be out here. I just think about all the kids who don't have bail money, who can't fight for themselves. That's what I do in my records, I try to speak for the people who can't speak for themselves. Tell how it feels from the 'hood or when they go to prison or given a bad shot in life."

Ice Cube said he comes from the gutter like everyone else.

"I made up my mind and nothing's more powerful than a made-up mind, and if you make up your mind on what you wanna do, you can accomplish it. That's what I did!" he said.

"I refuse to let the streets kill me or incarcerate me! It's a job to stay outta prison. You have to manoeuvre to stay outta prison. Just being a nice guy ain't gonna keep you outta there."

Ice Cube also talked about Key Ball, who spent 17 years in prison, got out, changed his life and is now "rolling" on the tour.

"It's a positive story for anyone who thinks 'man, I been down 10 years, I been down 15 years, I can't get back,'" Ice Cube said.

"You can get back if you got the right attitude. I'm praying for you! Come outta there and stay outta there!"

Pinnock said the Jailbreak program is "enormously supportive for listeners who may be in the same place" as the inspiring storytellers it features.

"People in prison are just ordinary people who stuff up," she said.

"They're often the best people you'll ever meet, who've struggled in life with unbelievable stories of trauma. It takes enormous courage and generosity in spirit to share personal struggles and experiences on radio."

Jailbreak visits any NSW correctional centre and has been known to visit prisons interstate.

Jailbreak is the longest continuously broadcasting prison radio program in the world. It's also been a pioneer in the use of podcasting, and a growing number of Jailbreak podcast episodes are playable online direct to listeners in NSW prisons via link on the inmate tablets.

You can listen to the whole Ice Cube interview speaking to Kate Pinnock in one of the Jailbreak podcast episodes shortly to be uploaded to the inmate tablets in NSW.

JAILBREAK Prison Radio
CRC community restorative centre

About Jailbreak:
Jailbreak is the longest continuously broadcasting prison radio program in the world

From March this year, Jailbreak podcast episodes are playable online direct to listeners in NSW prisons via link on the inmate tablets. You can listen to the whole Ice Cube interview shortly to be uploaded to the inmate tablets.

Experiences

Beyond Stereotypes: Young Men on the Inside

Teachers and their students share some words with *About Time*

By teachers and students in a juvenile justice centre

Continued from page 1.

"I have been in and out of the system for the past four years. I spent my 16th, 17th and 18th birthdays in juvie. Growing up in a broken home with barely any food, I began committing crimes to support my family... now that I have been in and out of juvie, I realise this is not the life I want to live... I have wasted so much time and now I have realised time is precious.

I have also realised that when you are locked up, your family is locked up with you too."
- A

"I haven't been back home for a long time, a lot of hard work will help you in the long run, but these demons is gonna follow me wherever I go they're gonna come... all this pain you have will catch up."
- J

The boys I teach have barely attended school when they are not in custody. Their files are full of suspensions and expulsions and behaviour management strategies.

They get psychological evaluations and have been pushed to the side for other organisations to deal with. They have lived on the streets, watched people die, and existed in the throes of turmoil.

This life experience at such a young age has provided the young men with a huge desire to protect those that cannot protect themselves and an overarching theme of displacement, as well as a deep well of resilience and humour.

I do not know the answer to the increasing rate of youth crime, I only know that the boys I teach, despite being on the cusp of darkness, always ask how my son is; they remember his birthday, his favourite TV show, the foods he likes to eat.

I only know that locking a child up does not stop them from committing crime, it just pushes them further into the belly of the beast.

I work a second job at a bar and one night one of my ex-students walks in. We are both caught off guard, but in an instant he is smiling and asking how I am. He tells me he has gotten work as a removalist, and one of his other friends who was also locked up is now studying at university.

After he has had a few drinks he comes back over to me, he looks at me with a stern gaze, and he says, "If you need anything, you let me know. Thank you so much for everything." And I thank him back.



Write to Us

We are a new paper; a new idea. We welcome all of your thoughts about how we can make this as successful as possible. Is there something you want removed from the paper? Something you want added? Let us know.

And also, please let us know if the paper is being circulated properly in your prison. Is everyone receiving a copy, or are there issues with distribution?

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'Always Keep Going': Jai's Journey Getting Clean With an ABI

Transcript from *All Been Inside*, a Voices for Change podcast



By Jai

Jai is a Tommeginer man and a dedicated single parent to two children. Self-advocacy has changed Jai's life and he loves communicating the messages of disability-justice self-advocacy.

voices for change

About:
Voices for Change is a self-advocacy group for people with acquired brain injury and experience of the criminal justice system. Somewhere between 40–90 per cent of people incarcerated in Australia's prisons have an acquired brain injury – compared to only 17 per cent of men and 9 per cent of women among the general population. We use our lived experience to advocate for this to change.

If you think you might have an acquired brain injury and would like more information, we encourage you to raise it with your support worker or a nurse in your prison. You can also write to Voices for Change at:

PO Box 297
Fitzroy VIC 3065

I acquired a brain injury from a motorcycle accident I had when I was 20. I hit a tree pretty hard, and I split the motorbike helmet into two pieces and knocked myself out. I ended up in Brisbane hospital, and they said I had a shade over one side of my brain and that I had a minor brain injury.

From then on it's been a bit of a struggle, but I make sure that I just don't give up. I always keep going. One thing that I'll never do is give up.

It does affect a few things. There's only so much I can concentrate on. My memory is really shot, it takes a while for things to register in my brain. My reading and writing has gone downhill, and it takes me a while to understand things. I need things put into layman's terms now, whereas I was pretty okay with a lot of words back in the day.

Emotionally it was really hard. I didn't understand what it meant and how it was going to affect me. It was pretty upsetting to find that I'd slowed down quite a fair bit.

I was involved with the criminal justice system when I was 17, and that was a bit of a shock to the system.

After having the Acquired Brain Injury (ABI), I was so angry, I was just out of control and I just hit it, and I couldn't continue – I hated it. I hated life after that – I hit the drugs really hard.

Having an ABI and using drugs and alcohol, it does not mix. It doesn't work well, but you try to shut things out and that way I could escape the fact that my brain injury was affecting me and it'd make it even worse.

While I was on drugs and alcohol, I was not a good person. I ended up fighting all the time, really I was just not a good person to be around. And it's so hard to get off as well. So trying to get off the drugs and the alcohol, because you've done it so much, trying to block out everything, was not an easy task.

Having an ABI in the courts and listening to their jargon was so hard, I never understood it most of the time. I was pleading guilty to things that I couldn't have done. Nobody explained half the charges I was going up for.

I hit my late 30s and that's when I became clean and stopped using.

I got clean because I had a really bad episode. I found out that I was diabetic. I woke up one morning and I was really, really sick. I couldn't move, I couldn't walk, I couldn't talk. It was like I had a mini-stroke.

The withdrawal coming in the hospital was really, really good. They said to me, you've got a choice: "you want to see your kids grow up or you want to die." The withdrawal process in the hospital was so good because they did it slowly. They didn't pressure me to do things really fast.

Now I have been sober for four years, nearly five years off alcohol, heroin.

I was paroled through the Access and Referral Court (ARC). When I completed that, it was probably one of the best things I'd ever done because I'd never completed anything before. The judge gave me encouragement, he goes "mate, you can do this. Not many people do but I can see that you really want to quit this and you want to do it. So keep going, make yourself proud." And that's what I did. I was so happy.

When he said to me "well done, you've done it." I was so happy, because I'd never, ever completed anything before, and the opportunity that he gave me, I'd never had that before. When I got that certificate at the end to say that I completed it, it was amazing.

I want people to know it's really doable – you can stop, you can get yourself back to square one. You can get back to yourself. You're always going to have your ABI, you're going to have to understand that that's okay, it's not a bad thing. I want people to understand that you can stay clean, you can focus on other things.

As an Indigenous man and having full custody of my kids – I'm doing something right. It's doable – you can have your kids. You can have your licence. I ended up succeeding in a lot of ways that I didn't think that I was able to do.

Understand that in today's society, a lot of people are willing to help you, and all you need to do is ask, and I'm pretty sure a lot of people will take that time to help you now."

The work that I do with Voices of Change, I advocate for myself and for others that are out there that have an ABI, to help themselves and to know that there are people out there that are the same, and have an ABI, and to let them know that we can do these things, we can achieve these things.

Same Walls, Different Time

Doing time is never easy, no matter how long you're inside

By Benjamin Aitken

Benjamin Aitken is an artist whose work is influenced by personal experience and a commitment to social change. Aitken applies the insights gained from his experience serving time in prison to his studies in social science, majoring in criminology. Aitken is curious about how his two passions, art and criminology, can intersect and influence each other.



'New Guernica' 2021, Benjamin Aitken

The length of a sentence behind bars changes how time is felt, and how society reacts once it's done. There's a tendency to think that longer sentences are automatically "harder" and that short-term prisoners somehow got off lightly. But that's too simple. Both come with unique burdens, and both deserve recognition.

Prisoners doing long stretches often face deep psychological and social isolation. Years away from family can mean missing key milestones, children growing up, parents aging, relationships ending. The world outside doesn't wait.

Technology moves fast, slang changes, even money looks different. The longer the sentence, the more the prisoner risks becoming invisible. Friends fall away. People stop writing. Sometimes, even family fades. That isolation cuts deep. And while time can soften public memory, it can also erase a person's sense of belonging. But long sentences also demand inner strength. Doing it hard doesn't just mean enduring time, it means holding onto identity and hope when everything else has changed. That's not easy. And coming out after a decade or more is rarely the "fresh start" people imagine. It's a social and emotional free fall.

On the other hand, short-term prisoners often walk straight back into the chaos they left. People are still talking. Family and friends may not have had time to process what happened. Shame, judgement, and strained relationships are waiting at the gate. There's pressure to "bounce back" quickly, to get a job, fix things, act normal. But the emotional toll is real, even if the sentence was short.

Those on remand are often overlooked, yet facing some of the harshest uncertainties. Held without conviction, they exist in limbo, waiting months or even years for their case to be resolved.

There's no sentence to prepare for, no release date to anchor them, just a relentless state of instability. Access to programmes is limited, support is minimal, and the stigma is just as heavy. Some may even walk conviction free after trial, but the damage to employment, family ties, reputation, and mental health is already done.

Being on remand isn't a lesser form of imprisonment, it's a distinct kind of psychological punishment and often served alongside convicted criminals.

When I left prison, my court case was still in the news. Colleagues across the country were only just finding out about my offending, and I spent months having the same conversations, answering the same questions again and again. At a time when I needed space to process what had happened and think about my future, I was surrounded by judgement and stress that made it hard to maintain my mental health.

At one point, like many others I'm sure, I thought it might be easier to just go back to prison. The idea of avoiding everything, trading real-world problems for the controlled isolation of custody, crept in far too easily. It was confronting.

I pulled myself up from that train of thought quickly, but in that moment, the word *institutionalised* became very real to me.

Short sentences don't mean short consequences. A few months inside can still cost someone their job, their housing, their kids, or their mental health. And there's often no real support on release. In fact, shorter sentences often come with fewer programmes, less preparation for reintegration, and more risk of being pulled straight back in.

Time doesn't just pass in prison, it shapes people. Whether someone has done six months or 16 years, they carry the weight of that experience long after the gates open. Every sentence has its own challenges, doing time is never easy. No matter how long the clock runs.

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Learn

How to Write an Official Letter in Four Easy Steps

By Simon

Simon writes from Cessnock Correctional Centre in NSW.

Simon has been a professional writer, university lecturer and business owner for nearly forty years.

All of us need to write formal letters at different times in our life. Many of them will be for legal questions or problems. Some will be inquiries, complaints, job applications or requests for information. And some could be to support a legal appeal.

For many people, these letters can be a real pain to put together. And in prison, where there's no internet, people have an even tougher time of it. In all the prisons I've been in I'd say less than one person in six has any confidence writing a letter.

Decades ago, when I worked in the Commonwealth Public Service, I learnt that most people struggle to write letters. A lot of the time, in our department, we had to ask for further information. This delayed inquiries even more. Even worse, loads of letters didn't even make sense. It was usually obvious the writer was angry or in some kind of need, but we couldn't work out exactly what they needed. And if someone was rude, well, best of luck getting a quick or helpful reply. Those letters were dumped into the "angry box" to cool off for a couple of months – or years.

Last year, the *Better Business Bureau* in the US warned that a half of all letters sent to companies are very weak, confused or even useless. Either they aren't clear enough about what's needed, or they aren't precise enough. In other words, most letters miss the mark. They certainly miss opportunities to have an impact.

So here's a quick 4-step guide to writing a smart and powerful formal letter.

1. PRE-PLANNING

Before you begin, ask yourself "what exactly do I want to achieve with this letter?" Am I crystal clear about what I want? Do I know exactly what I need, where it is and who I should ask? And importantly, is there something better I might ask for? Spend just five minutes thinking about all this.

If you just want to vent about a problem or about your situation, make sure you sharpen your arrow. Pick your battle. Be smart. Don't rant!

Spend time finding out where to send the letter. This may not be as obvious as you first imagine.

- Ask an officer or case manager for help.
- Check out all the info on the inmate computers, especially the Legal Portal.
- Make sure the contact details are up to date for the person you're writing to.
- Try to get hold of an organisational chart that sets out all the roles and names. This may help clarify who you need to contact.
- If all else fails, ask a friend on the outside for help.

2. STRUCTURE

This is the design part. Think about how the letter might look. What are the different sections and what will you put in them? Write a few words for each of the following steps. You can bulk it out and make it look pretty later.

Who are you and what's your situation or status?
This bit provides your basic information and should fit into one paragraph at the start of the letter. It should include a very brief description or what you want. So, who am I? Where am I? What's my ID info or number? Why am I writing this letter?

Tell them about your problem and what you need
In many cases you'll need to provide more information on your individual circumstances. This is the second paragraph. Unless you're lodging some kind of appeal, keep this part short and simple. The reader doesn't want or need to know what you had for breakfast back in the summer of '69. If they need more details, they'll ask for them.

Provide more background if necessary
This might be a narrative of the history of your case. It might include names, dates and particulars (remember though that most letters won't need this level of detail).

Tell them one more time what you need
This is the final paragraph. It restates what you need and repeats your request. You would normally only do this in a fairly long letter.



Willy Pleasance

3. WRITING THE LETTER

Presentation matters!

- Use a 're' field that states in a few words what a letter is about. For example: "Re: Problems with my application for a pilot's licence."
- Always quote the reference (ref) number if you have it.
- Don't crush your letter. Put a space between the paragraphs. Use wide margins.

Style
When you start writing, there's a Goldilocks principle to keep in mind. Make sure the temperature is just right.

- Be direct but polite. Try to come over as professional and clear-headed (you attract more butterflies with honey than you ever do with vinegar).
- Don't get personal unless it's to talk about yourself.
- With government agencies, be cautious and diplomatic.
- Don't tell them their job. People hate that.
- Thank them in advance for their help. Apologise for bothering them.

Always ask about alternative steps or other avenues in case they can't help you.

Tip: If you're not sure who will read your letter, just start the letter with "Good morning."

4. CHECK IT

Look carefully over your letter. Does it say what you need it to say? Is it clear and logical? Are there any spelling mistakes?

EXAMPLE:

Fred Smith 99999
Cessnock Correctional Centre
PO Box 32
Cessnock NSW 2325

29 November 2023

The Officer in Charge
Licenses Division
Department of Shiny Things
Sydney NSW 2000

Good morning,

I am an inmate at Cessnock Correctional Centre (MIN 999 999) and I am preparing for release on 27 December 2023. I am writing to ask for an urgent appointment with your information services team.

I have had a commercial pilot's licence in India since 1988, but I believe this fact will not be registered on your system. However, I need to know whether I can transfer the licence to Australia.

If you are unable to help me, would you please advise what further steps I can take?

Yours faithfully,

Fred Smith

Make sure you sign the letter as well.

Tip: If you know exactly who you are writing to, sign off with "Yours sincerely." If you don't know, it's "Yours faithfully."

Health

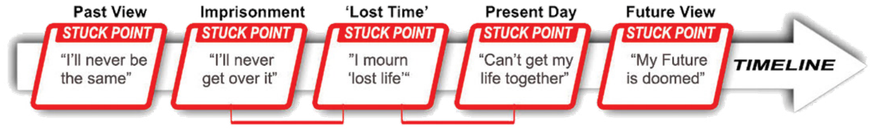
Breaking the Cycle of 'Stuck Point' Thinking

The trauma of time in prison can cast long shadows over the way we view our whole lives, from the past to the future. All too often, distressing 'stuck thoughts' take hold and rule our lives. Ex-inmate Steve Rothwell offers some strategies for getting your thinking 'unstuck', and getting your life back on track.

By Steve Rothwell



Priscilla Du Preez via Unsplash



Steve Rothwell spent many years running from the trauma of his incarcerated past until he broke down emotionally and realised he had to not only face the known demons of his past, but also the stuck points that were holding him back: The Devils He Didn't Know.

Steve put all his research and writing skills into developing a system that gave him his life back, and nowadays, he is devoted to helping others overcome trauma.

Nothing can prepare a person for the torrent of troubling thoughts that imprisonment can bring about, both while inside and after release. Day by day, time inside changes your personality, confidence and sense of self. Without you knowing it, all sorts of negative messages take root in your mind and become 'stuck thoughts', which are damaging feelings, thoughts and ideas that feel impossible to move on from.

The purpose of this article is to raise awareness of the hold that 'stuck thoughts' can have over you; to show you how to notice and identify 'stuck thoughts', and how to challenge and overcome them.

Exercise: Identifying 'stuck points' and associated negative thoughts

Joseph* was imprisoned for nearly two years. He spent a lot of time in his head. His thoughts were often repetitive, overwhelming and caused him much distress. To take control of these 'stuck thoughts', he decided to write them down.

The diagram above shows some thoughts Joseph wrote down, identifying how he was thinking and feeling about different stages of his life, from the past to the future.

1. Identifying 'stuck thoughts'

The first step on the road from being stuck, is to notice your persistent thoughts and write them down. These thoughts are often tied to specific times in one's life. For example, if you think about the past, what thoughts come? If you think about the present or imprisonment, what thoughts come? When you think about the future, what thoughts come? These can be good and bad, and from there, you can then identify 'stuck thoughts' – or unwelcome ideas that seem impossible to shift. For example, in Joseph's diagram above, the 'past view' box means that when Joseph thinks about the past, the persistent thought is, 'I'll never be the same'.

2. Identifying other thoughts that led to 'stuck' beliefs

The next step is to notice other thoughts, or associated thoughts that led to the stuck beliefs. These are likely to be fleeting thoughts that come and go. While they may not be as persistent as stuck thoughts, they are harmful and are a building block for the 'stuck thought'. For instance, Joseph realised that his 'stuck thought' of "I'll never be the same" was informed by the following thoughts:

- I have an idealised view of 'The Old Me'
- My personality feels lost
- I feel empty
- My previous strengths seem to be missing
- I can't enjoy things like I used to

Only when Joseph was able to see all this written down could he begin to challenge these thoughts and perceptions. Only then could he see distorted and exaggerated thinking, and set about putting these misapprehensions to bed.

3. Rethinking, reframing and challenging negative or distorted thoughts

The next step is challenging his thinking and learning from the negative thoughts.

In regards to an idealised version of his past self – 'The Old Me' – he realised it wasn't the truth. From the negative place of prison, he could only remember the good things about his past life. When he was able to look at this thought with objectivity, he could see that his life was far from ideal; after all, he was on a path to prison. By removing the idealisation of the past, he realised that life changes are inevitable and can also bring positive things.

He also realised his 'lost' personality feeling was somewhat overblown. It was mostly a distortion – a perception of himself that his friends didn't recognise. He remembered grimly keeping his head down through his sentence and realised this was a mindset that persisted after release, interfering with his ability to go out and have a good time. He resolved to consciously rebuild his sense of self and be patient as he did so.

His sense of 'missing' strengths was a normal response to having his confidence rocked, and over time, he regained composure and realised he had other strengths. His time in prison had even provided him with new strengths – for example, it made him more patient! This opened the door to new possibilities.

On enjoyment, he decided to allow himself some adjustment time when he leaves prison, acknowledging that it is okay to feel numb for a while. He also realised that what he enjoyed in the future would be different to what he enjoyed in the past, but that this did not necessarily mean it was worse.

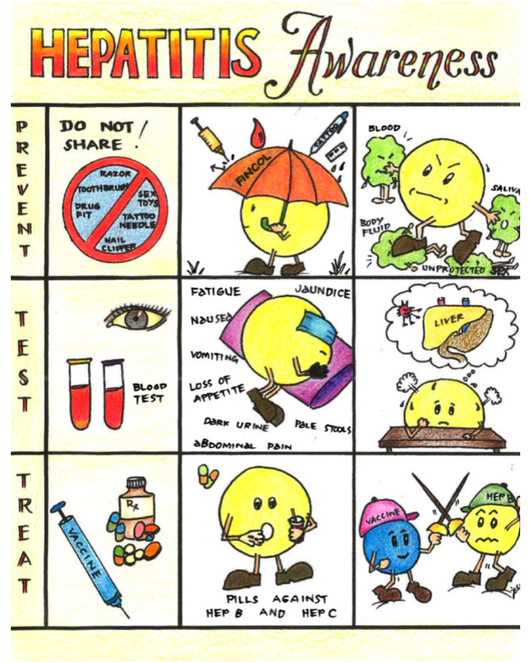
All of the above allowed Joseph to see his old 'stuck point' of "I'll never be the same" in a completely different light. He acknowledged that the statement is true – indeed, his life had changed, but that the troubling 'bite' that his old belief had was now gone. He didn't feel controlled or owned by it and felt ready to move on to working on all his other 'stuck points'.

How can this exercise help you?

I welcome you to try this yourself. Use Joseph's timeline of stuck points as a template, or take a big sheet of paper and write a timeline on it, marking off and filling in key moments in your life, good and bad. Once you have done that, concentrate on noticing and identifying those unwelcome ideas that seem impossible to shift, as well as any associated thoughts. The moment you catch yourself stuck in a thinking loop, pause. Notice when you're replaying the past. That urge to go over it again and again comes from how deeply the event hurt you. The worse it feels, the more your mind tries to 'solve' it by thinking it to death. But you already know the ending, and no amount of replay will change it.

You've moved past smaller failures before. This is heavier, yes, but it's still possible to shift. You can use the same principles: pause, reset, redirect. Give yourself permission to let go. It's not denial – it's survival. Dare to believe you can heal, even from the hardest parts. That belief is your starting point.

'They Told Me I Had It, and Then They Helped Me Get Rid of It'



This article and artwork were shared with permission by two people currently in custody in NSW.

My name's Kyle. I'm 35, a proud Aboriginal man, and I've been inside this NSW prison for a few months. I just got sentenced the other day. I've got about four more months to go. That's where I'm at right now. But there's more to my story than just time.

I found out I had Hep C while I was in here. I didn't know before. No one ever told me anything about it on the outside – what it was, what it did, how to deal with it. It just wasn't something people talked about. Out there, people keep stuff like that quiet. Maybe they're ashamed, or maybe they just don't know. Either way, I went through years not even thinking about it.

Then one day, they were running a Closing the Gap thing in here. That's like a health event with nurses and Aboriginal workers. They asked if I wanted to get tested for Hep C. I said yeah. I knew I probably should. I'd been injecting inside, and so had my brother. It wasn't something I was proud of. So when they asked about the test, we both got tested.

When they told me I had Hep C, it felt like a punch in the gut. Not because I was shocked, I kind of expected it. But because I didn't really know what it meant. I just knew it sounded bad. Hep C, I'd heard of it, but that was about it. Didn't know what it did to your liver. Didn't know it could be treated. I thought once you had it, that was it.

But the way they handled it in here wasn't what I expected. There was no shame. No judgment. No lectures. Just, "You've got it. Here's what we can do." It wasn't like they were telling me off. They were just straight with me. Calm. Respectful. Like, "It's all good, we can fix it."

The doctor and nurses got me on treatment straight away. No mucking around. The support was solid. I didn't have to chase them or wait months. They explained everything properly, no injections, just a course of tablets over a few months. Then it was done. I was cured. I felt better. That was it. No side effects that I noticed, but some people do get them like headaches and tiredness. Just something simple. And it worked.

Getting that kind of help inside meant a lot. There's not much in here that feels easy, or like people have your back. But this did. I actually felt looked after. Like someone wanted me to get well. That doesn't happen a lot in jail. You're usually left to figure stuff out on your own. But with this, the nurses were there the whole way through.

What meant the most was getting treated alongside my brother. He had Hep C too, and the nurses fixed it so we both started treatment at the same time. We didn't plan that, but when they offered, we said yes straight away. Going through it together made us stronger. We backed each other. We reminded each other to keep taking the tablets. We talked about how it felt. It gave me something to focus on. Felt like a fresh start. Not just for me, but for him too.

I told my nurse, Emily, it felt like being clean again. Not just in my body, but in my head too. Like a weight had lifted. Emily gets it. She knows how hard it is to get health stuff sorted in prison. She says, "It's hard – especially because people are in and out all the time." That's the truth. People fall through the cracks. They leave before treatment finishes and don't stick with it, or they don't even start. But I didn't. It worked for me. I stayed. I finished it. I got cured.

And I've got another reason to stay healthy now. I found out I've got twins on the way. That hit me in a good way. Gave me something real to look forward to. Made me want to be ready. It's not just about me anymore, it's about being around for them.

When I heard about the twins, it kind of made everything click. Like, I'm not just doing this treatment to get better. I'm doing it so I can be a better dad.

In here, most days are just about getting through. That's how it is. You put your head down and count the days. But hearing "you've got twins coming" – that changed things. Made me think about the future, not just the time. Gave me hope. Made me want to keep going. To come out strong. To show up for them.

That's what I want people to know. Hep C isn't the end. It's something you can deal with.

If you and your doctor think it's right for you, you can get tested, you can get treated, and you can walk out of here cured. It's not hard. You just have to say yes. That's what I did. And now I'm cured. That's not a small thing. That's a big thing.

If you're inside and they offer you the test, take it. Don't wait. If they tell you you've got it, don't freak out. It can be sorted. Just like it was for me. I didn't think it would be easy, but it was. The nurses helped. The treatment worked. And now it's gone.

So yeah, that's my story. I had it. They told me I had it, and then they helped me get rid of it .

I'm good now. And I'm ready for what's next.

Developed by Justice Health and Forensic Mental Health Network NSW, the provider of healthcare services to people involved with the criminal justice and forensic mental health systems in NSW.

Call HepLink (1800 437 222) for hepatitis information and support. HepLink is a free and confidential service and does not require a Medicare card. Normal call rates apply.

You can also call AIVL, the peer-led peak organisation advancing the wellbeing, health and human rights of people who use drugs, on 1800-MYAIVL(692485) for information and peer support, it is free, confidential, and no Medicare is required.

The appropriate treatment for an individual patient is for the healthcare professional to decide, in consultation with the patient.

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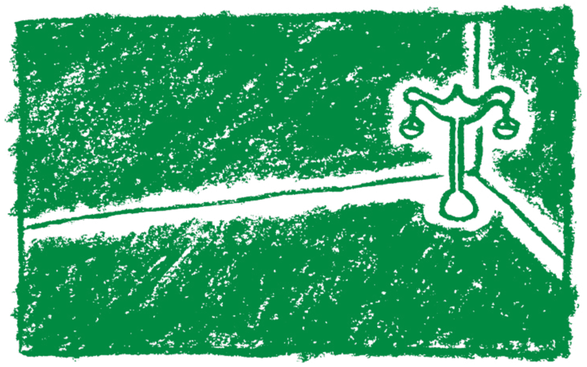
Legal Corner

Laws Around Strip Searches in Prisons



By Daniel Vansetten

Daniel Vansetten spent nearly 12 years in prison and has since gone on to study a Bachelor of Laws. He uses his lived experience and study to advocate for the rights of people in prison.

Important:
This is legal information and not advice.

Strip searching is a security practice purportedly used by prison authorities to prevent drugs and other contraband from entering prisons. Yet, according to sources including the HRLC and the Queensland Human Rights Commission (QHRC), 20 years of research, investigations and inquiries have shown no convincing evidence that strip searches effectively reduce contraband from entering prisons.

According to a 2017 Human Rights Law Centre (HRLC) report, Corrections Victoria conducted 6,200 strip searches in six months across two women's prisons. In these searches, only six items were detected – four tobacco or nicotine products, a "small quantity of gum" and one unidentified object. It is data like this that questions the justification by prison authorities across Australia in their use of strip searches, particularly in the face of the harm caused to those subjected to these searches.

The impact of strip searches goes much further than the embarrassment of standing naked in front of strangers. People subjected to strip searches are forced to assume certain positions and conduct certain acts upon themselves that are significantly degrading and dehumanising.

Policies facilitating strip searches are regularly criticised for not considering the unique circumstances of women, transgender and First Nations people – resulting in further dehumanisation. Women, for example, are required to remove tampons during a search. Transgender people are often strip searched by officers of the opposite sex, despite general rules requiring strip searches by same sex officers. These rules determine a person's gender at birth and ignore gender reassignment. The rules of strip searching across all institutions appear to completely omit any consideration of cultural sensitivities of First Nations peoples.

According to the 2023 report by QHRC, 'Stripped of our dignity', the harm caused by strip searches includes psychological and emotional harm and regular re-traumatisation of women previously subjected to sexual, physical or emotional abuse.

Despite the evidence that strip searching is harmful and ineffective, strip searching is legal – in all states and territories, in some shape or form. So what are the laws that allow this practice to continue?

Laws surrounding strip searches

Laws allowing strip searches are found in every state and territory across Australia. Their relatively similar provisions allow strip searching of incarcerated people when entering prisons, when visited by someone from the community, when moving between certain sections within a prison, when there is reasonable cause to suspect possession of a prohibited item, for security and good order of a prison and for the safe custody and welfare of prisoners. These vague terms often make challenging the legitimacy of a strip search difficult.

The processes are relatively consistent across all jurisdictions, requiring that strip searches are done by at least two officers; are conducted as expeditiously as possible to minimise the impact on the prisoner's dignity and self-respect; avoid unnecessary force; are done in an area that provides reasonable privacy and only in the presence or sight of a person who is necessary to ensure the safety of prison officers conducting the strip search; does not involve touching of the prisoner's body; and allows the prisoner to dress in private immediately after the search.

There are also many slight variations. Victoria allows strip searches by one or more officers of a different gender to the gender that the prisoner identifies with if the governor is satisfied the search is urgent and officers of the same gender as the prisoner are not available, or the belief that such search is reasonable. Tasmania requires a female to be 'searched or examined' only by female officers but there is no equivalent requirement for males.

A.C.T. requires the searched prisoner to remain partially clothed at all times, while Queensland requires the prisoner to remain partially clothed if 'reasonably practicable.' Partially clothed means that a full search is done in stages – the upper body first, then the lower body.

Queensland allows a 'body search'; an examination of an orifice or cavity requiring the assistance of two medical practitioners. Such search requires a reasonable belief that the prisoner has ingested something that may jeopardise their health or wellbeing, or risks security and good order of a facility, or that the search may reveal evidence of an offence.

Northern Territory allows an 'intimate search' of the genital area, the anal area, or the breasts (of females). Such search requires a reasonable belief the prisoner has concealed a prohibited thing, or a thing connected with an offence against prison rules.

The future of strip searches

Many believe that advances in technology allowing full body scans will significantly reduce or end the practice of strip searching. Prison authorities across many jurisdictions appear motivated to release information to the public confirming the introduction of body scanning technology into prisons.

For example, Queensland, New South Wales and South Australia have made public statements in the last year confirming the introduction of body-scanning technology, particularly in women's prisons.

Advancements in the enactment of human rights laws, such as in Victoria, Queensland and A.C.T. has not prevented strip searches but has resulted in fresh challenges based on human rights principles.

In 2021, the Victorian Court of Appeal upheld a claim that the routine use of strip searches prior to urine testing was an unjustified limit upon the right to privacy and dignity (see *Thompson v Minogue* [2021] VSCA 358). These routine searches allegedly prevented contamination of urine samples. However, the Court found the prison authorities failed to show that these searches had that effect.

Earlier this year the Supreme Court of NSW heard a trial for a class action suit against NSW police for conducting unlawful strip searches on people at music festivals. A spokesperson for Redfern Legal Centre stated that, 'for decades, people have been humiliated, intimidated and often left traumatised by these experiences of police officers abusing their powers.' The outcome of this trial is pending.

While technology will likely reduce the use of strip searches, it seems unlikely these invasive searches will be discontinued in our prisons given their continued support from government and prison authorities. If you believe you have been subjected to an unlawful strip search, you should contact the Ombudsman or seek legal advice.

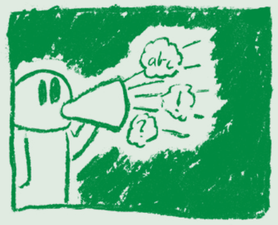
Is It Mandatory to Do Courses at Minimum Level Security to Get Parole?

By John

John writes from Lindisfarne, Tasmania.

To About Time,

Is it mandatory to be at minimum security to get parole? A lot of courses are only offered when at minimum and then courses can take six months to complete. I am currently appealing my sentence, but that means I cannot move to a lower security rating. Would I be forced to drop my appeal just to get to minimum security? Is this fair? My parole is due November 12 but I can't see how I can get it.



Response from About Time:

Completion of courses and parole
Once someone at prison becomes eligible for parole (which is usually, but not always, after you have served either half of your sentence or at least 6 months of your sentence), then a decision can be made about parole. This is a decision made by the Parole Board.

To make their decision, the Parole Board will get reports from the prison (for example, about any issues with behaviour). They might also get reports from a medical professional such as a psychiatrist.

The Parole Board must consider several things when they are making their decision – this includes whether it is likely the person will re-offend, any efforts the person has made to engage in rehabilitation (which could include any courses the person has completed in prison), and their plans for post-release (which might include housing or employment). So while the Parole Board will take into account whether a person has completed courses, it's not the only thing they will look at to make a decision about parole.

To get more information or advice about parole, you can speak to the Prisoners' Legal Service – contact them via mail at:

132-146 Elizabeth Street
HOBART TAS, 7000

or by email at:

prisonerslegalservicetas@gmail.com



Legal Q&A

Do you have a legal query that you want answered? Is there an area of law that you think people inside should know more about?

Send us your question and we might publish an answer in the paper. So far we've written about bail, parole, remand, freedom of information, making complaints, disability support, financial stress, and more.

Let us know what you want to know! We are looking for questions of a general nature, rather than personal situations.

All information that we publish is of a general nature, and is not a substitute for professional legal advice.

Write to us via the below postal address:

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000

Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

contribute@abouttime.org.au

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Aadil Ahmed
Accredited Specialist in Personal Injury Law NSW, Law Society of NSW Accredited Mediator
Call: 02 9158 9650

Reintegration

From Prison to Purpose: How I Found Freedom, Brotherhood, and Peace

By Ronin Cruise

Ronin is based in Queensland and has been out for a few months. He wrote a book during his time in prison called Pri-Zen.



Alice Hartrik

I really didn't want to leave prison this time. I just wanted to stay without having to worry about adjusting to a world that didn't suit me. It was a pretty messed up mentality to have, but after all this time coming in and out, that was the way I saw prison – a safe place away from all the bullshit that the world teaches you. If I had found freedom in prison, then what was even the point trying to fit in with society?

This is what I told my parole officer. I said, I love prison – don't threaten me with a good time. She was shocked, not only by that, but by me telling her I was depressed and I didn't even want to be out of prison.

In the beginning, when I got out, my life lacked purpose. As I sat at home trying to do the right thing, something was still eating away at me. I sat there in loneliness. I was struggling. Drugs had found their way back into to my life and I felt it had started all over again in a another cycle towards suicide or prison.

But then things started to turn around. I managed to stop using, and get into training. After one night at Muay Thai, a brother who knew I had been struggling, came up to me and prayed for me.

Though he was Christian and I'm Muslim, I still accepted his prayer. Later that night, I met a guy called Robbie Hamza who is an active member in the Islamic community. Since I met him, we kicked it off. He invited me to hand out pizza to the homeless in the West End and even helped out a couple of times with a charity called Muslim Charitable Foundation which helps out with people who are struggling on Centrelink or members of our community that just need a little help from time to time.

I began to feel needed and filled with purpose. I was in the gym training regularly and was praying daily and helping out in these community and charity things whenever I had a chance.

On top of all this I also managed to put together a camper van which I took on a few weekend trips. Life was awesome, but at the same time, something wasn't quite right.

At home, there were snacks galore and all sorts of unhealthy options. When I came home at the end of a big day of training and charity stuff I would eat whatever. I'm grateful that I have my family but as I began to fall into Netflix binging and Instagram doom scrolling, I felt like I wasn't achieving my full potential.

So I decided to pack the things I need and go live the van life for as long as possible.

Right off the bat, it was heaven sent. I went to the gym and trained, then went to Muay Thai followed by doing a shower and recovery afterwards. The gym that I signed up to has a full recovery centre, a boxing room, pool, saunas, about five different exercise areas, a massage chair room and even had WiFi for me available 24/7. The very first morning I woke up in the van, I was already at the gym so I went to train and use the bathroom facilities. It reminded me of prison, having the yard within walking distance of my cell. Next, I went to the shops and bought some steak since I'm on that carnivore diet, cooked it up in the carpark and went straight back to the gym for another session. After this, I went to volunteer at the Lighthouse, which is a charity that gives discounted groceries to people.

I've been at it for over a week now and though I'm not training that crazy everyday, I'm always at the gym at least once a day. Even while writing this article I'm sitting in the massage chairs where I also bring books to read sometimes.

All in all, as someone who has really struggled in the past to adjust to the stresses and expectations of the outside world, it seems that there is more peace in what I'm doing now. I don't think I can ever go back to making money for the sake of living. But participating in these things that actually make a difference to people's lives humbles my heart dramatically. It allows me to use my experience and understanding of the world I have come from and openly show compassion to others that have been in my situation.

Long story short – don't settle with what society expects of you. Especially now while you're in prison. Use your time to find out who you are and what you truly enjoy doing. Experiment with different outlets for your energy and time. I can tell you what the view looks like from my perspective but at the end of the day, it will never be the same through your eyes.

I know sometimes we self sabotage and that our body freaks out because it isn't used to doing what you're trying to do. But if you can break those barriers and find a purpose, maybe you might break the cycle one day. If not, you and the generations that are to come have to deal with it. I know I did and I'm still learning everyday.

Here are some tips for the outside:

- The gym is a cheap place to get things you need – showers, WiFi, training – between $20-$40 a week
- Talk to Centrelink and your doctor about mental health support and exemption from working if needed
- Try different things: sport, hobbies, religion, gym.
- Be around people and community. In prison we socialise naturally. Don't just doom scrolling and waste time, get out there.
- Reach out if you need help – find brothers or sisters that get what you're going through. It can be lonely out there as a crim trying to break the cycle but there is support.
- Don't chase money – find purpose and the doors will open afterwards

Much love and respect to my brothers and sisters inside.

Holding On to the Dream

Finding meaning after the sentence

By Tabitha Lean & Debbie Kilroy

Tabitha and Debbie are part of the National Network of Incarcerated & Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls.

When you come to prison, it's not just your freedom that's affected. Often, it's your ability to imagine a future that feels like your own. So much of daily life becomes about what's decided for you – what you eat, when you sleep, what you wear. But it goes deeper than that. The space to dream, to choose a path based on who you are and who you want to be, can feel like it disappears.

Many of us had plans once. We had ambitions – maybe to work with young people, run our own business, become a nurse or a tradie. But, after prison, those goals can start to feel far away. There are roadblocks that make it harder: job checks, application knock-backs, limited work options. Sometimes it feels like the world wants to decide what kind of life is "appropriate" for us now. The jobs we are steered toward can feel like they were never really chosen, just what's left.

This can wear you down. You start to wonder: Is this it? Is this all I'm allowed to aim for now?

It's easy to feel like you're stuck treading water – getting by but not really going anywhere. It takes a toll on your spirit. When your future is shaped more by barriers than by choices, it's hard to feel like you're truly living.

The weight of judgement, the assumptions people make about you – it can box you in long after the sentence is over.

But here's the thing: even in the hardest places, dreaming is still possible.

Imagination doesn't have to be a luxury. It can be a tool for survival. A quiet resistance. Even when the world tells us to settle, we can still hold onto the idea that our lives are worth more than just "making do". We can still imagine and work toward a life with purpose, creativity and connection.

Everyone has the right to dream. To expect. To imagine a version of life where we get to decide who we are – not just live with who we've been told we are. That kind of dreaming is powerful. It keeps something alive in us. Something worth fighting for.

We are more than our past. We are not just statistics or sentences. We are people with stories, talents, goals and heart. And, while the road may be harder, we are still allowed to dream big.

Because dreaming isn't just for the privileged – it's for all of us.

If you would like to join the National Network of Incarcerated & Formerly Incarcerated Women and Girls (it's free), you can contact them:

By Mail:
The National Network
PO BOX 3407
South Brisbane QLD 4101

Email:
admin@thenationalnetwork.com.au
(if you have access to email)

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000
Australia Post

Have Feedback?

Are you and your friends receiving the newspaper every month?
We are distributing the newspaper to every prison, and we have asked your staff to provide the copies to you directly. We want to hear from you:

- Are you being told that the paper is available?
- Are there enough papers going round?
- Have you experienced any issues or difficulties getting your hands on a copy?
- If you only have access to a digital copy, would you also like a physical paper?
- What do you like about the paper? What do you want to see differently?

Please send us a letter to let us know if there are any issues, and we can help fix them.

Please ask your friends for their feedback as well, and put that into your letter.

Kairos Outside

For women impacted by having a family member or friend in prison.

Kairos Prison Ministry Australia

Rachel attended a Kairos Outside weekend and said:
*"I was fortunate enough to be invited with my mum as a guest to a Kairos Outside weekend, the theme of which was "Hope to Carry On". It was there that I heard the stories of other women just like me; women whose **husbands, fathers, sons, daughters, friends** were imprisoned. I heard how they'd felt, how they'd survived and I cried a flood of tears. I couldn't believe that there were other women, even Christian wives, who actually knew what I was living through. These women were an inspiration and they have helped me to start living again. I found the "hope to carry on" through the Kairos Outside family."*

No judgement.
No expectations.
No financial cost.

Tell Your Family and Friends about Kairos Outside
www.kairos.org.au/kairos-outside
or search **"Kairos Outside Australia"**

• Mob

The Creation of ArtworkByAalayah



Becoming an Indigenous artist inside prison

By Kelly-Marie Margreot Roma Flanagan "AKA" ArtworkByAalayah

Kelly Flanagan is a female First Nations artist with lived experience in the Victorian prison system. She is an advocate for women inside, and is also using her lived experience to write her first book.

I am a proud Wiradjuri woman who has struggled with my identity for generations.

This is not the journey I planned. I didn't wake up one day and say, 'I want to go to prison and become an artist. I better start applying to all the different gangs and drug dealers and see who is hiring.' No, that's not how it happened. In fact, the road was a lot darker, violent and overall ruthless.

Human life has no meaning in the dangerous game of drugs and crime.

Nothing had value except rock. Everyone will lie, steal, hurt, and fuck you over to get it, keep it and have it. My story is a painful story. I have seen life taken from another person; their last breath taken while lying in my arms. I watched a man take the bullet that was meant for me. I still think about him every day. In that life, this is the real career path you're choosing: addiction, jail, institutions, death and homelessness.

It's not glamorous and no matter who you are or how big you roll, we all come crashing down. That's the real story and doesn't it sound like heaven.

Having your family taken away, your life stolen from you, home invasions, murders, suicides, violence, rapes, and people who think of you as human garbage and a means to an end. That's it. There is no love in the game. Not really. Whether you know it or not. You're being conned right now. They are planning it, and you will never see it coming. I've experienced it and so will you. You might be Queen today but you're going to be their pawn tomorrow or the day after, I will guarantee it.

From there, I went into prison. It's a system that didn't care whether I got clean or if I reoffended and kept coming back through their gates.

After four days in the police holding cells, I had my period and was not allowed to shower, change my pad or underwear. I remember guards pulling faces at how I smelt. I was strip searched, my body tormented. It was awful. I went into DPFC a broken woman and prison broke me more.

But let me tell you the story of what my life is now. The new me is at peace with myself and the ghost of my past.

I found art and The Torch project. In prison, I was given a canvas and five different coloured paints and told to express myself. I thought, 'yeah, ok sure, I will do that.' I threw the canvas under my metal prison bed and left it sitting there gathering dust. I looked at it a few times, but it didn't really interest me. I got so depressed, sad and alone after my dad had a heart attack in Bali and I couldn't talk to him. My mind started playing tricks on me. I became very sick, mentally unable to cope. I locked my door, and I reached for the canvas and literally threw paint on it. Swished it around with my fingers as I didn't have any paint brushes. That's when ArtworkByAalayah was born.

I didn't know it yet, but that canvas became my savior. The game changed and I kept at it every day for hours at a time without knowing that I was creating another path and another future for myself.

Now over 30 paintings later and hundreds of hours dedicated to my craft, the recovery and transformation of myself is breathtaking and truly remarkable. I am surrounded by art everywhere I go. The beautiful sky, the women protesting in the streets of Melbourne, the Victorian buildings, all the beautiful faces and all the different races. My blank canvas is a blank world that I can fill with whatever I choose.

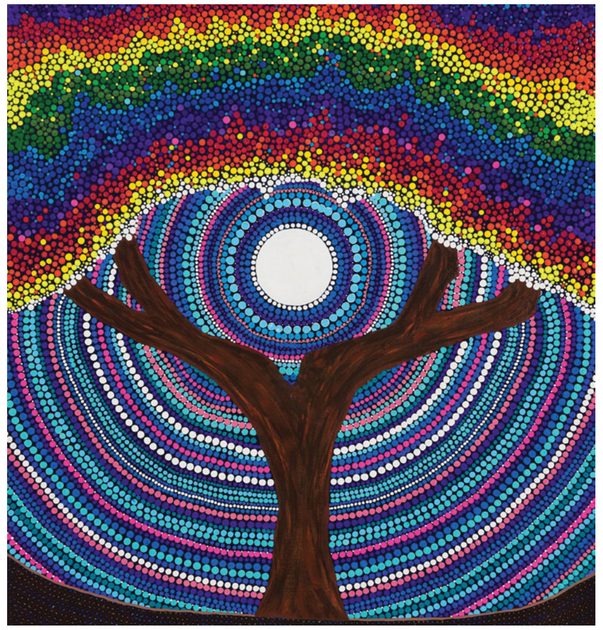
My world is new, unknown and I have never lived this day before. To be honest I have not lived my life before now.

Thanks to all the love, care and support I have been given by the beautiful people at The Torch, Flat Out and FIGJAM. They all believed in me even when I didn't believe in myself. They saw something I did not. I was scared and I didn't know love, honesty, pride, self worth and vulnerability. Now I have all those things. Becoming an artist in prison was not my plan. In fact, none of this was my plan. But it's the gift God has given me, and I will cherish and nurture it for all my being.

This year, I am telling my story at 'Confined 16' exhibition, an exhibition of First Nations incarcerated artists in Victoria. I was one of the featured artists and I painted live at the exhibition and showed all the visitors my craft. My girls from FIGJAM and Flat Out were there to cheer me on and support me. The love I get today makes me excited for all the new experiences that life offers me.

Art saved my life and created this warrior I am today. I say yes to every opportunity that comes my way. If it's not illegal, dishonest or hurts me or anyone else then I take a chance. This is the story of ArtworkByAalayah.

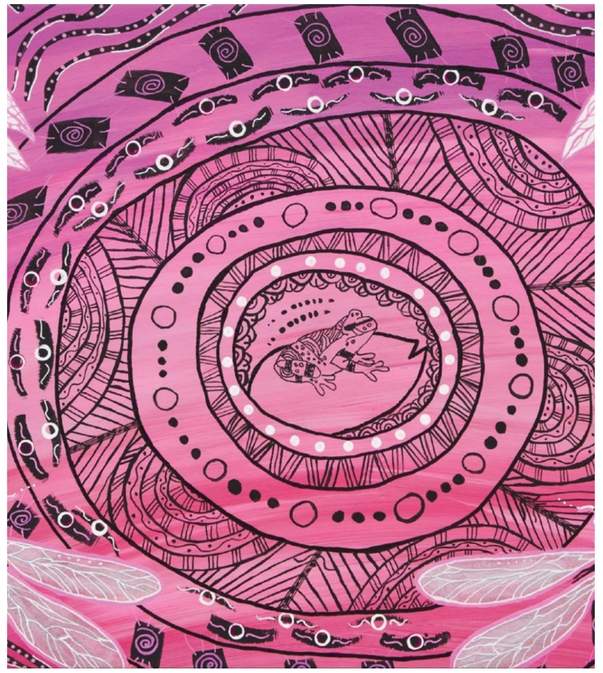
Kelly started writing for About Time whilst imprisoned at DPFC in Victoria. Whilst inside, she wrote on the cost of phone calls and lack of housing for people on parole. Kelly continues to write regularly for the paper, and is part of About Time's lived experience writers network. Keep a lookout for her writing (and art!) in future editions.



'Queer Joy is My Love Language'



'Journey of Discovery'



'Beginning of Something Beautiful'



'Walk In My Shoes'

• Send Us Your Creative Pursuits!

We're looking to print more artwork from people in prison.

If you have any sketches, paintings or other creative pursuits – please send them to us! We'd love to see them.

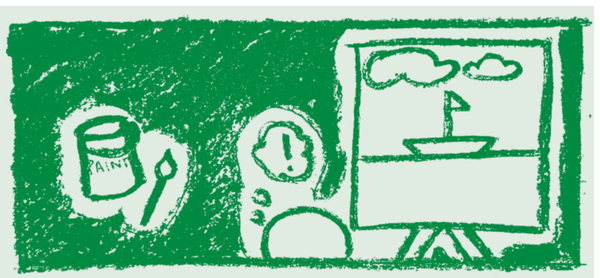
Staff members at your prison may be able to scan and send them to us via email.

Please send your letters to the below postal address:

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000

Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

contribute@abouttime.org.au



Culture



StudioCanal

Film Review of *Wicked Little Letters*

By Vincent

Vincent writes from Long Bay Correctional Centre in New South Wales.

Set in the period following 'The Great War' (World War I), Wicked Little Letters is a comedic re-telling of true events that took place in Littlehampton, England. It follows the tale of a mischievous letter writer with a penchant for obscenities as the wide-spread receipt of profanity-laden letters spark a public uproar, police investigation, and a high-profile court case. The investigation to uncover the culprit and the relationships between the ladies of Littlehampton is captured utilising peppery and tongue-in-cheek dialogue.

A significant theme of the film is gender relations and Christian conservatism, as the story frames the town's gender dynamics within the Christian belief system and its associated social structures. The defects of patriarchy are revealed through the battles faced by the film's primary protagonists. Edith (Olivia Colman) is shown to live in complete servitude and subservience to her overbearing father. Rose (Jessie Buckley) is constantly asserting her independence as a single mother while deflecting taunts and digs at her supposed lack of modesty and morality. Power relations in the workplace are seen through the experiences of Gladys (Anjana Vasan) and how she contends with male colleagues and superiors in the police force. .

Wicked Little Letters is a fascinating story of how profanities alone disrupted and confronted the public moral consciousness of a small English village. A slight downfall of the film is its almost too-simplistic portrayal of male dominance and conservative naivety. The viewer does need to suspend their critical thought to fully enjoy all that this movie has to offer.

Review:
3.5 jailbirds – "A foxy film!"

Paper Chained Prison Art Exhibition Goes National!

By Damien Linnane

After running Australia's first ever international prison art exhibition in Sydney in May last year, it was great to be able to finally tour the works to another city. We plan to bring the art to a new city each year.

The Paper Chained International art exhibition features over a hundred artworks from incarcerated people in Australia and overseas. The exhibition toured to Brisbane in March as part of the Beyond the Bars exhibition organised by Green Fox Studios.

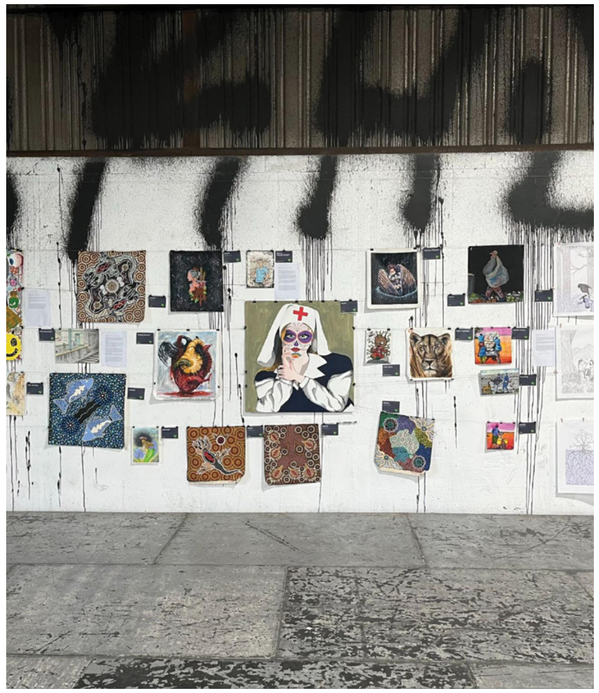
Paper Chained magazine is aiming to tour our international art exhibition to a different city each year, with the next exhibition to be in Newcastle, New South Wales, in February next year.

If you have any artworks you would like displayed at that exhibition, or just in our magazine in general, please send them to us, or write to us for more information.

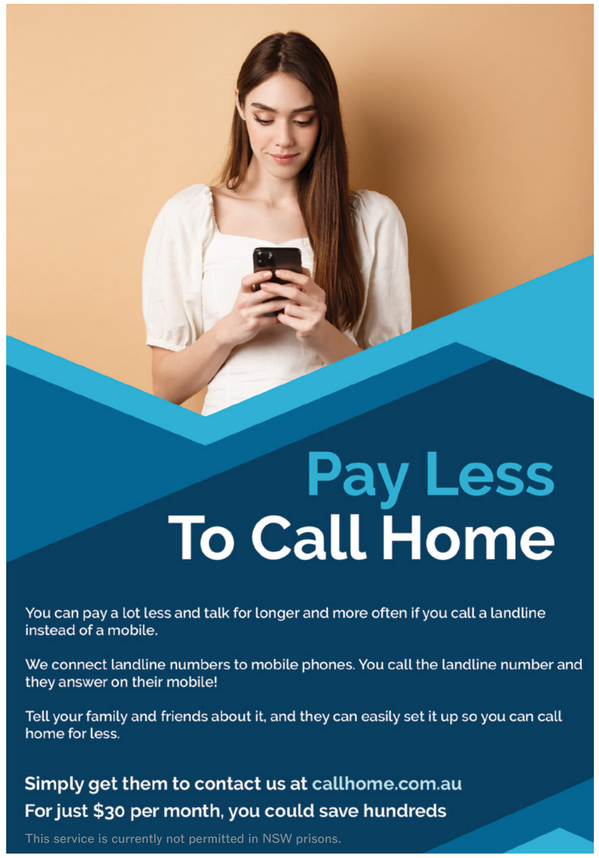
Paper Chained
PO Box 2073
Dangar, NSW 2309

We cannot assist with getting your art to us, but after the exhibition we can post it to your family or friends on the outside, as prisons will likely not accept artworks other than drawings on paper being posted back in. Otherwise, we can just hold on to your art for future exhibitions – it is completely up to you.

Incarcerated people in Queensland are advised to seek approval from Corrections to be part of the exhibition, as you may face internal discipline otherwise.



Exhibition installation in Brisbane this year



Creative

A Dialogue Between Poets

By Krystal

Krystal writes from Numinbah Correctional Centre in Queensland.

I found this poem titled Until and I wrote a poem on my reflection to it.

Until
By Anonymous
Until you've been arrested
And spent endless days in jail
And walked a hundred miles
Without ever leaving your cell
Until you've lost your family
And you're utterly alone
You try to seek comfort
Realizing it was left at home
Until you've faced a judge
And entered your guilty plea
you've heard the words of judgment
That you won't be going free
Until your days turn into months
And months turn into years
You lie awake at night
Shedding endless tears
Until you've lost all hope
And every dream you've ever had
You fight to keep your sanity
And fear that you'll go mad
Until you've gone through these things
And lost all human will
How can you look at me and say
You know how I feel.

But Then
By Krystal
But then you say to yourself
Fuck it!
I've got this, I mean I've already
pretty much done it
I'm in the now. So why not live in
the present
Take my learns and see them as a lesson
So rather seeing my plea as I'm already
forgotten
Take it with grace and receive
It for the blessing
As there is something at play here
much more than you know
But then in time you'll see,
It will be discovered as you begin
to grow
From dust to ashes as the Bible
would say,
Meaning let go take the reigns
Whilst you love in him each and
every day
But then you see it, you finally see it
How it's all been in your head,
How it's all been an illusion
As you slip away from the worldly
delusion
To the picking yourself up to start
setting your soul free
As you make this the beginning of you
changing your life's plea.



Malnight, Junee Correctional Centre in New South Wales

Doing Time Together

By Anonymous

Anonymous writes from Ravenhall Correctional Centre in Victoria.

Doing time together, under lock and key,
But helping others can set your mind free.
The past is gone, the future's not arrived,
Focus on now, be glad to be alive.

Have a second thought before abusing screws,
I know it's frustrating, but you'll only lose.
Be slow to anger, put ego aside,
Tolerance and patience will be tried!

Don't be concerned what others have done,
Vigilante mentality is not on.
Consider others and make a good choice,
If you're not outside, use your inside voice!

Be kind to each other, ask R U OK?
One short question that goes a long way.

Let Go

By LV

LV writes from Dillwynia Correctional Centre in New South Wales.

Let go, let go of your enemies
Let go, let go of your hate
Let go and forgive

Let go not because you are scared
Let go not because you are no longer angry
Let go because they are human
Let go because you are human
But unlike your enemies...

Let go because you have awareness
Let go because you have strength
Let go because you have compassion
Let go because you can move on

Let go to free yourself from hatred
Let go to free yourself from anger
Let go to free yourself from sorrow
Let go to so you can free up your strength
Let go to so you can work on yourself
Let go to so you can work on what you want
Let go to so you can work on what is important

Let go, let go of your enemies
Let go, let go of your hate
Let go and forgive

Let go because you are not scared
Let go because you are not angry
Let go because you have moved on
And unlike your enemies...

You have to let go because you can

The Castle

By Cody

Cody writes from Karreenga Correctional Centre in Victoria.

This writing is based on a prompt from the June issue of *About Time*.

The brooding castle had overlooked our town since time immemorial. Its dark parapets loomed over us, perched high on the behemoth mountain so familiar to me. I had lived in its shadow my whole life.

Now, I am living in it. I am its sole inhabitant. My only companions are the howling winds through the halls, the soft susurrus of the mighty oaks in the courtyard and the hollow haunting hoots of the parliament of owls that seem to enjoy the view. The deep, winding innards of this beast of a castle keep me occupied for days on end. Until they come. They flog me with whips and chains. They leave me senseless on the floor of whatever room they find me in, blood and tears mingling like a depression cocktail. I get up, I press on, I refuse to break. I pass the spot where I was beaten last fortnight. The blood has been scrubbed away by my hands, but the memories remain. No matter how far I wander these labyrinthine halls, they always find me. So, I often return to the castle proper and gaze upon the life I left, wondering when I'll be able to return. I find a small parcel of food in the kitchen—beans and bread. Better than what I sometimes get.

I take to painting the peeling walls of the rooms, with paints and brushes and rollers provided by my assailers.

You know what they say. Do the crime, do the time. Only, I'm doing my time in a castle, mocked by the view of my home town, knowing my family looks up at the stronghold in an entirely different way they did during my childhood. Instead of an exciting enigma, it is now the fortress in which their son is locked up.

Write to Us

Your contributions are the centerpiece of the paper. If you would like to contribute to *About Time*, please send your letters to the below postal address:

About Time
PO BOX 24041
Melbourne VIC 3000

Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

contribute@abouttime.org.au

Rachelle, Not Double 7

By Shelly (Rachelle)

Shelly writes from Southern Queensland Correctional Centre in Queensland.

Sitting in this cage, barbed wire
all around.
Been transported here, but first my
wrists are bound.
Heavy metal locked, no chance of
breaking free.
Got no chance against one ning,
let alone three.
Sent to secure, cause the machine had
me flagged.
Sitting there hopeless while my
belongings are bagged.
I got my new identity... double seven.
Knowing my chances are slim that I'll
end up in heaven.

Hell's where I'm headed after the crime
I committed.
I knew it was wrong but I still fucking
did it.
Sitting alone in my cell so cold and
so dark.
See a familiar face come in, I finally
get a spark.
That spark slowly fades when I realise
that they're fake.
In here true friends are fucking hard
to make.
A rare few you'll meet worth sharing
your time.
The rest are all snakes and you'll leave
them behind.

The screws don't give a shit, to them
you're just a number.
Think of the lowest of the lowest, and
that you're still under.
Use your time to get clean and stay off
the drugs.
Won't it be worth it for a life of your
kid's kisses and hugs.
Trust me I know even though it's only
my first time.
I'm taken from society while still in
my prime.
I'm not able to talk to or to see my son.
Life of drugs and jail also took my mum.

I remember being young and
lacking support.
It's hard to be 13 and hold up the fort.
That's when life begins to go down and
not up.
Try to talk about your problems, get told
to shut the fuck up.
One day I'll start to learn from my
mistakes.
Cause it's not just mine but my family's
hearts I break.
Watch for that day cause I'll finally soar.
This low life I'm seen as will once be
no more.

Maybe one day I will make it to heaven.
I'll be known as Rachelle, not double 7.

Live Your Life

By Garry

Garry writes from Ravenhall Correctional Centre in Victoria.

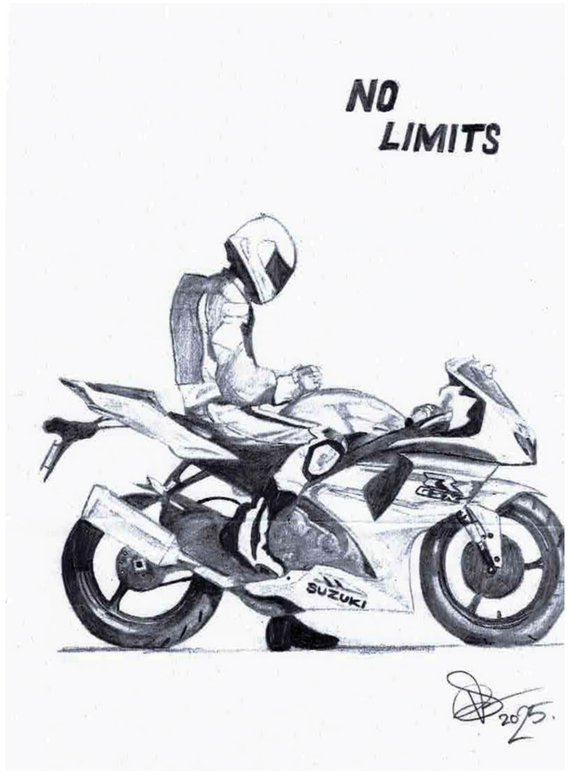
Our ego asked what is our purpose.
We search for enlightenment, it's in
us all.
Happiness is a choice so make it yours.
Forgiveness of others will lead you
to peace.
Leave behind the mind chatter of time
passed.
Love and enjoyment is still in our grasp.
Be still and accept that life is a gift.
Oneness will come and give you a lift.
We only have now so forget the rest.
It's your life so give it your best.
Go along with the magic that acceptance
may bring.
Spirit and passion will come from
within.
To live your life with vigour is not a sin.
From this day forward let us all begin.

Morgana

By Alex

Alex writes from a prison in Australia.

I remember the day I saw you
I held your tiny form
The chilly air made you tremble
So, we took you home
You grew up so quickly
To our great surprise
And tore around the unit
Right before our eyes
Your way of playing
Seemed unable to control
But when I asked you to stop
It stilled your restless soul
And now I've lost you
For a mistake before your birth
And my existence from now on
Is diminished on this earth
Never will I see you
Or hear your joyful cries
I wonder if you remember me
As I wipe my flooded eyes
The fault is mine and always was
I've known that from the start
But knowing I've lost you forever
Has shattered my worthless heart
I know your life is going well
And you have everything you need
But ill always wonder if you would
want me
If I had been freed
So, as I sit here writing
You've probably gone to bed
With images of sea creatures
Swimming through your head
There's just one thing more
That I need to say
And that is just "I love you
And I miss you every day"



Vishal draws from Alexander Maconochie Centre, ACT.



Against All Odds: The Story of a Little Shrub

By Sam

Sam writes from Kirkconnell prison in New South Wales.

I wrote this story over a day or two just after I had been transferred to Kirconnell gaol from Cooma where I had been assaulted by my cellmate. Kirconnell represented a significant improvement in my living conditions; it was more like a 2-star motel (with barred windows) than the soul-less conventional goals (six of them!) that I had experienced over the previous four months. The story of the little shrub is therefore somewhat allegorical in that it allowed my writings and reflections to bloom despite the privations of gaol.

Once upon a time, a sleepy little shrub lived a contented but impoverished life in a quiet shady corner of a garden. Although the little shrub did not complain, it was much smaller than most of its other friends, and its branches were thin and twig-like. While the little shrub had a few leaves, they were all a mottled yellow green, not a healthy pure green. Worst of all, it had never flowered or even produced a flower bud. But, in its own way, it was comfortable living its own little life; it received just enough sunshine each morning to get by and, when it rained, its thin roots were well watered.

One day towards the end of autumn, the wise old gardener, who loved all his shrubs, needed to make room for larger and more beautiful plants. He arranged for the little shrub to be moved from its comfy, secluded position to a more isolated part of the garden. However, the move tore many of the little shrub's fine roots and damaged it badly.

The forlorn and frightened little shrub found itself in a place where the soil barely covered its spidery roots. The little shrub felt unwanted and sad. In addition, the little shrub discovered that it had been planted in soil just above a thin slab of impenetrable concrete. That part of the garden had been used for many years as a dumping ground for all kinds of rubbish.

What was the little shrub to do? If I do nothing, the little shrub thought, I will surely die. My roots can never grow through that concrete. More frightened than it had ever been, the little shrub wondered how it would ever get food and be able to survive with all these problems. The little shrub was lonely, as many of its friends would no longer come to visit—the earthworms, the little beetles, the brightly coloured butterflies. They all had better and more important things to do, and more beautiful plants to visit.

But the little shrub decided to count its blessings: it'd been replanted where the sun shone upon it most of the day, and where the gentle breeze cooled the surface of its hot leaves in the late summer afternoon. The soil, although very sparse, was rich enough to keep it fed. Best of all, the wise old gardener still cared about the little shrub, as he did about the whole garden.

So, making the best of what was available to it, the little shrub, full of purpose and hope, was determined to survive. Day after day, and week after week, the little shrub managed to get by. The going was tough; it was not easy to grow in its new position in the garden. Some days it was so cloudy that there was no sunshine, but the little shrub knew that the sun would shine again and that the deep-blue sky would return. Some days no cooling breeze came, and its leaves would get scorched and burnt. On other days the wind blew bitterly cold; it howled and ripped its little leaves from its branches. On still other days an army of ants or a battalion of beetles ate the little bits of food which the little shrub needed to stay strong. Many times, the little shrub felt cold and hungry and wanted to give up completely. The little shrub would often ask itself what the point was in continuing. Where was all this determination to survive going to lead?

Despite the many doubts and all the obstacles in its path, the little shrub was determined to keep living. Months turned into a year, and it grew stronger, ever so slowly. When the sun shone and the breeze blew gently, and when it had enough to eat, the little shrub became more hopeful, more courageous, more persistent. It became grateful for all it'd been given to help it survive.

Its little roots gradually grew, and they became longer, thicker and stronger. But life for the little shrub was still a struggle.

More months passed. Then one morning in early spring, in the still–crisp morning air, the old gardener saw that his little shrub was different. The little shrub did not seem 'little' any more. Something about it had changed. New, unfurled, green stems had appeared on a number of branches, and several of the stick–like branches had become thicker and more robust. The little shrub had become taller, as if it were reaching into the deep blue sky. It was also thicker and wider. Lush, bright-green leaves gleamed in the sunlight, and many new, pink shoots had appeared, as if overnight. And then the gardener saw something that he'd never seen before on one of the little shrub's slender branches: a flower bud.

In the weeks that followed, the little shrub's appearance continued to change a great deal. The little shrub now stood tall, noble, filled with life, and sprouting new branches, new leaves and new buds. Finally, about a month later, it flowered, and it soon became engulfed in pure-white flowers, each stained with small blood–red flecks. The flowers had a delicate, sweet perfume. No other shrub in the garden had flowers, nor a fragrance, that could compare. It made the gardener smile. He looked at the shrub, and he saw that it was good, very good. The little shrub had never felt so awake and alive!

As the weeks passed, the shrub became the gardener's showpiece, more beautiful than any other shrub in his entire garden. Butterflies and buzzing bees, attracted by its sweet fragrance, returned and visited every day to admire the shrub, and to show their other insect friends. Neighbours came to collect small cuttings for their own gardens, and to give away the cuttings as presents to their friends. They praised the wise old gardener as no one had ever seen a more beautiful and elegant shrub. What had once been a forlorn, scrawny, little shrub had now become all that the old gardener had originally intended it to be.

Over several years and seasons of flowering and bringing delight to those who saw it, the shrub began to feel tired, very tired. It was running out of energy. It was the shrub's turn to die. Gradually, its leaves became fewer in number, and they changed from bright green to mottled yellow. It flowered less often and the sparse flowers that remained shriveled too soon.

Yet the shrub was full of deep joy. It could now look back and be thankful for all that had happened to it during its life. It remembered the warmth of the sun, the gentle, late-afternoon breeze in summer, the richness of the soil, and the many insect friends it had met. The shrub also remembered the bad times, only to realise that without those bad times, it would never have grown to become so beautiful. It even felt grateful that the old gardener had allowed it to be uprooted and replanted, as painful as it had been. The gardener had meant no harm, only good. The bad times didn't seem so 'bad' any more. For whatever had happened to the little shrub, the wise old gardener had always been there behind the scenes, in control. Even when the nights were very dark, they were never completely black; there had always been at least one far-away, twinkling star to give the little shrub hope.

It made the shrub think. So many beautiful things had happened since those times when things were not going well and everything had seemed so bleak. Not only had it become the centrepiece of the garden, but the gardener had been very proud of the shrub. He had given it a little bit more water and food whenever extra care was needed. And from now on, the little shrub would flower in thousands of gardens every year. Little shrubs would grow tall and bloom again every spring in the gardens of everyone who had come to take a small cutting.

And what a wise old gardener! The shrub never found out why the gardener had allowed it to be uprooted, nor whether the gardener ever knew that the little shrub had been replanted above a slab of concrete. But it didn't matter—the shrub could see no loss, only gain. The concrete slab had not been a barrier at all, even though it appeared to signal the end of life. No, it wasn't like that at all, for although the little shrub's roots could never penetrate the unyielding concrete, the roots had grown, and grown, and grown until they had grown right around the concrete slab into richer, deeper soil. The shrub's roots had grown around the concrete slab so thickly that the shrub appeared to hold the piece of concrete in its embrace. The ferocious winds still came from the south and uprooted other shrubs, even the taller, more beautiful ones. The rainstorms still came and threatened to drown the other shrubs in the garden. But the shrub would only smile at the ferocious winds and the driving rains—it was no longer scared of what they could do to it.

In its final weeks, the shrub remained at peace; as it looked back, it saw that there had been a plan and a purpose to its little life which now made sense. And, in the end, this was really all that mattered: to learn that every experience in life gives us the chance to become who we were always meant to be. We can all reach into the deep blue sky. And, for that, we must be grateful.

The little shrub had learnt that every experience—especially the 'bad' things that happen to us—are gifts that can be turned into sweet-smelling flowers that bring joy to others.



Share Your Story

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PO BOX 24041
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Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

contribute@abouttime.org.au

Play

Quiz

Test your general knowledge on our monthly quiz!

1. Which country has the most official languages?
2. What is the smallest bone in the human body?
3. Who was the first woman to win a Nobel Prize?
4. Which planet has the most moons?
5. What is the capital city of New Zealand?
6. Which famous scientist introduced the idea of natural selection?
7. What is the longest river in South America?
8. In what year did the Berlin Wall fall?
9. Which element is represented by the symbol ‘K’?
10. Who was the 16th President of the United States?
11. Which author created the character Sherlock Holmes?
12. What is the largest internal organ in the human body?
13. Which country was formerly known as Persia?

Word Search

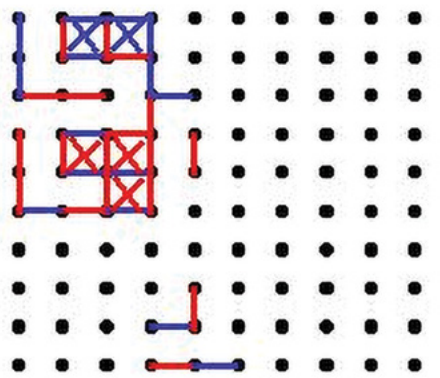
Can you find the 20 hidden words (listed below) in the puzzle?

G S Y N S D X Q J G C Q C Q F
F R K O I A T L N E L J C U P
U C M P F G A X G K B J A I Y
Y U Z S O T H D R I T T P E E
N R A I R T S T V V C I T T M
O T K I T I X D H E R M U V G
M H I H R M W N D S N E R N L
R G N R E A N A V N M T E V I
A I G U S G B S Y I Z K U E M
H L D L S I M A M A N T J R M
O E O E B N R O L R H T O O E
P D M M U E K W U A P Z K L R
E N Z O C Z Q H C S N T E P L
N B R N P E R F U M E C S X M
Y N L B P J T M G S V U E E B

1. Adventure
2. Balance
3. Capture
4. Delight
5. Explore
6. Fortress
7. Glimmer
8. Harmony
9. Imagine
10. Jokes
11. Kingdom
12. Lemon
13. Mouse
14. Night
15. Open
16. Perfume
17. Quiet
18. Rain
19. Sand
20. Time

Quiz Answers

1. South Africa (11)
2. Staples (Ear)
3. Marie Curie
4. Saturn
5. Wellington
6. Charles Darwin
7. Amazon River
8. 1989
9. Potassium
10. Abraham Lincoln
11. Sir Arthur Conan Doyle
12. Liver
13. Iran



Game – Dots and Boxes

Dots and Boxes is a two-player strategy game where players take turns drawing lines between dots on a grid to form boxes. The goal is to capture the most boxes by completing their fourth side.

Setup:

- The game is played on a grid of dots, typically arranged in a square or rectangular shape.
- The number of dots and the size of the grid can vary, but the basic principle remains the same.

Gameplay:

- **Turns:** Players take turns drawing a single horizontal or vertical line between two dots.
- **Completing Boxes:** If a player’s line completes the fourth side of a 1×1 box (a square), they "capture" that box.
- **Marking Boxes:** Players usually mark the captured box with their initial, color it in, or otherwise identify it as theirs.
- **Extra Turn:** If a player completes a box, they get another turn.
- **End of Game:** The game continues until no more lines can be drawn.
- **Scoring:** The player who owns the most boxes at the end of the game wins.

Example:
Imagine a 3×3 dot grid. A player might draw a line connecting two dots, and if that line completes a box, they would mark that box as their own and get another turn. The other player would then try to draw a line that either completes a box or blocks the opponent.

Key Strategy:

- **Blocking:** Players should aim to block their opponent from completing boxes and aim to complete their own.
- **Creating Forks:** Players might create situations where they can complete multiple boxes with a single line.
- **Long Chains:** In some strategies, players try to create long chains of lines that might lead to multiple boxes being captured.
- **Calculated Moves:** Strategic players will consider the potential consequences of each move, trying to set up their own success while hindering their opponent.

Bad Jokes

If you have a better joke please send them to us because these ones are terrible!

Q: Why don’t skeletons fight each other?
A: They don’t have the guts.

Q: I told my wife she was drawing her eyebrows too high.
A: She looked surprised.

Q: Why did the scarecrow win an award?
A: Because he was outstanding in his field... of disappointment.

Q: What’s orange and sounds like a parrot?
A: A carrot.

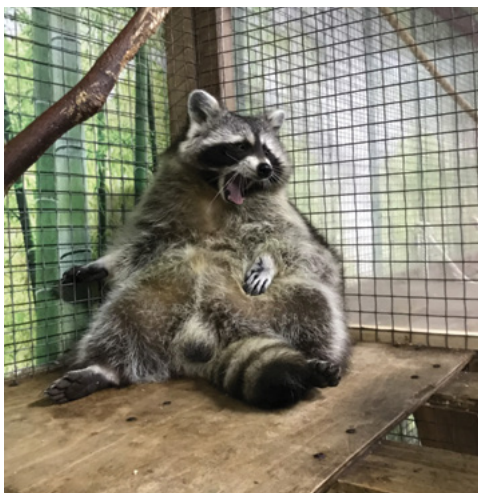
Q: How does a penguin build its house?
A: Igloos it together. (Barely.)

Q: I used to be addicted to soap...
A: But now I’m clean.

Sudoku

Fill in the box with numbers from 1-9 with no repeated numbers in each line, horizontally or vertically.

	9	3	1		4		6	2
	4				9		7	1
5	1	6		7		4	8	
	7	5	4			1	2	8
2				1		7	3	
1		8	7					
4	5	1						3
	8	7			5			
	2		3	4	1	8		



Caption This...

Submit a caption to this photo, and we will print the three finalists (including the winner) in the next edition.

Submissions:
Please send your submissions to the below postal address:

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Melbourne VIC 3000

Or, if you have access to email, you can email us at:

contribute@abouttime.org.au



Quino Al via Unsplash

Last Month’s Submissions:
Thank you for your entries into last month’s caption competition!

WINNER!
Did somebody say KFC!
Belly, Archerfield, QLD



May’s Submissions:
Thank you for your entries into May’s caption competition!

WINNER!
Is that you dad? Ya out of jail?
Bradley, Ron Barwick Prison, TAS.

Runner up #1!
Should have gone to spec savers!
Shona

Runner up #2!
You’re on the perch, I’m on the bottom bunk!
Stoney, Port Phillip Prison, VIC.